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PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: NOVICE
ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS FROM ONE REGIONAL UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Research
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Robert S.P. King

December 2019


PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: NOVICE
ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS FROM ONE REGIONAL UNIVERSITY


Date Recommended 10-31-2019


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I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Jennifer. It was through her belief in me that I started this journey and it was through her unyielding support I finished this “report.” I love you.

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Without the support of many staff and professors at WKU, I would have not achieved this milestone. I know that it is not possible to list everyone who assisted me through the years, so I hope it is enough that I am forever grateful that you were placed in my path to assist me on this journey.

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Robert S.P. King

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Directed by: Marguerita DeSander, Stacy Leggett, Thomas Stewart, and Lester Archer

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School Leadership has evolved over the years requiring school administrators to perform as both a facilities manager and transformational leader inspiring teachers to take risks and utilize innovative strategies to increase student achievement. This increased focus on educational leaders has created a challenge for colleges and universities to effectively develop programming to properly equip students to become educational leaders that schools desperately need, as illustrated by a review of the literature. New leadership standards, coupled with Kentucky's new star-rating system increases the expectations of school leaders as they work with diverse populations of students.

This study is a qualitative case study exploring how novice administrators, who recently graduated, felt their university principal preparation program prepared them for the rigors associated with school leadership. The researcher reviewed demographic data from participants' schools via the state's School Report Card site along with TELL Kentucky Survey data to develop a picture of leadership from the participants' student results and staff reviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each administrator to gain insight into how they felt their university's principal preparation program prepared them to lead schools when measured against the National Educational Leadership Preparation Standards.

Through cross-case analysis, the researcher identified critical attributes that college and university principal preparation programming must contain to equip students for the rigors of educational leadership. The research identified cohorts, quality of faculty, program structure, practical experience, internships, and communication strategies as critical to effectively developing the skills needed to lead a school in today's critical environment. The findings of this research correspond to the findings listed in the literature review and provides information to guide other institutes of higher learning as they conduct program reviews on their principal preparation programming.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The policies surrounding accountability for schools and districts have elevated the importance of qualified leadership. Principals are bearing more and more weight as old responsibilities persist and as new ones become layered on top of them (Manna, 2015). The shift in responsibilities followed each new introduction of educational policies starting with The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), released in 1965 to the current Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, focused on increased accountability of students' growth. Policymakers understood the importance of competent school leaders and called for placing highly qualified educational leaders in every school to lead teachers as they work with the challenges of educating and growing diverse student populations (Hemmer, Madsen, & Torres, 2013).

Leadership standards identify the leadership skills needed to effectively lead a school as well as to serve as a guide for today's educational leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). These standards form the foundation for the expectation of principals and illustrate the broad range of knowledge and skills demanded of principals leading teachers and students in today's schools. The challenges of understanding these newly defined, broad-spectrum standards and equipping principals for the rigors of principalship fell to college and university principal preparation programs (Hart, 2015). Several studies emerging in the last few years have concluded that while principals' understanding of the new leadership standards proved critical to obtaining success in leading a school, principal preparation programs have not adequately prepared principals

to be effective leaders (Kaufman, Gates, Harvey, Wang, & Barrett, 2017; Levine, 2005; Morrow, 2003).

The Emergence of the Problem

The lack of student progress among schools has prompted legislatures to create policies tying funding to performance goals. This increased level of accountability has led to the creation and subsequent refocusing of leadership standards guiding district and school-level leaders as they look for new and innovative ways to reach the diverse population of students currently enrolled in their schools (Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2017). The changing political landscape, policies governing accountability, and leadership standards identifying characteristics of successful principals have challenged even the most astute college and university leaders in creating programs to prepare graduates for the rigors of a principalship. According to several researchers, current principal preparation programs fail to address the challenges principals face in today's challenging school environment (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Murphy et al., 2017). Current principal preparation programs fail to equip graduates with the tools and skills necessary to achieve success (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Critical skills outlined in the newly drafted National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Level Standards dealing with vision, ethics, equity, instructional leadership, community relationships, and operations management are lacking in recent graduates from college or university principal preparation programs (Young, 2015). The problem with principal preparation programs stems from (1) a lack of understanding of the current problems facing principals and the best ways to prepare them for these problems, and (2) a lack of consistent methods for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of their program's

impact on the leadership success of recent graduates (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). The critical understanding of the lack of preparedness of today's principals can be summed up by Davis and Darling-Hammond's (2012) and Levine's (2005) assessment that principal preparation programs have failed to prepare new principals for the demands of leading a school in the 21st century.

History of the Principalship

While the academic progress of students seems to be the hot topic of debate in today's charged political landscape, one thing has remained constant; the one variable that is most likely to influence school reform is the leader selected to serve as the principal (Kafka, 2009). Principal responsibilities have transitioned through the years in response to increased accountability measures and an increase in the number of students failing to meet national benchmarks for learning (Hart, 2015). While principals have always been expected to wear many hats as they serve as building administrator, the sense of urgency has never been more pronounced than it is in today's highly publicized educational setting. The role of the principal has expanded from managing the building and staff to serving as an instructional leader focusing on newly adopted content standards and teaching pedagogy (Ediger, 2014). In the current stage of principalship, educational leaders are not only expected to manage the day to day activities of the building and serve as an instructional leader for the staff in all content areas but also now provide transformational leadership to transform the culture and elevate the staff for second-order change to occur (Kafka, 2009).

While the principalship has traditionally been viewed as a multifaceted position in education, the managerial role stemmed primarily from the management of federal-

sponsored funds and programs designed to support a special population of students identified as struggling academically (Hart, 2015). “The imperatives of control and accountability for resources and activities dominated public and institutional concerns, resulting in an emphasis on restraint and containment rather than on empowerment, initiative, and creative development” (Dembowski, 2010, pp. 4-5). As time went on, the role of the principal shifted from tasks associated with planning, implementing, monitoring, and controlling building activities to tasks associated with instructional leadership. The principal, working as an instructional leader, was viewed by their teachers as the primary source of curricular and pedagogy knowledge (Ediger, 2014). This shift was the result of the federal government coming under increasing pressure to improve reading and math scores across the nation in a bid to have the United States become more competitive on the global landscape tying federal funding to the increased scores (Cross, 2004).

The current state of the principalship requires the principal to serve not only in managerial and instructional leader roles but also as a transformational leader (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Principals who understand the new lens through which they must now operate also understand how important every staff member is to the overall mission and equipping students for success. Principals move from the managerial to a symbiotic relationship with their staff to change and transform their school into a place where staff feel supported and encouraged to reach their own professional goals while creating innovative learning environments to reach all students (Syed, 2015). This shift in leadership expectations was brought about through the political and societal pressures during the 1980s and 1990s. The leadership shift forced schools to focus on instructional

results leading to a very narrow leadership focus for the principal to concentrate their already stretched resources during the period of increased accountability. This narrow focus of principal responsibilities led to neglecting the professional needs of staff and the cultural needs of the learning environment, deepening the divide between teacher and principal (Corcoran, 2017). To increase the teaching abilities of staff as well as the assessment scores of students, principals needed to step away from the supervisory roles and work collaboratively with the staff to create innovative solutions capable of engendering success in all students (Cuban, 2013).

Leadership Standards

Studies agree that the responsibilities of the principalship have increased over the years, encompassing far more than the original framework of school leader expectations conceived (George W. Bush Institute, 2016). In response to the increased level of expectations placed upon the mantle of principals, professional standards for principals have been created, revised, and re-imagined through the years. When first introduced, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards set the norms for the knowledge, skills, and general leadership abilities school administrators would need for success (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). As principals worked with the ISLLC standards, they agreed that the managerial role they once held had shifted to that of an instructional leader. In order for principals to be successful, a clear vision needed to be effectively communicated to everyone involved with their school (Morrow, 2003). The ISLLC standards broke school leadership down into six standards and 31 functions ranging from facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning to responding to and influencing the political, social, economic,

legal, and cultural context encompassing education (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The ISLLC standards gave way to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) that are designed to effectively meet the demands and challenges associated with a school in the 21st century (Murphy et al., 2017). The PSEL standards consist of 10 domains centered on student learning that spoke to responsibilities such as establishing the mission, vision, and core values of education as well as the basic operations and management of a school. The PSEL used the ISLLC standards as a starting point and shifted the focus towards student learning, establishing a list of foundational principles to guide educational leaders as they work to ensure each student is prepared for the challenges of the 21st century (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The ISLLC standards and PSEL set the stage for the newly designed National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards as principals looked for more guidance to address the increasingly complicated responsibilities associated with the principalship (Young, 2017). The NELP standards are broken down into a set of standards for building level administrators and a set of standards for district-level administrators, providing clearer guidance for the unique set of responsibilities of each position (Young, 2017). The newly drafted NELP standards for building administrators limited the number of standards to eight and unpacked the content and experiences for each of the standards as well as their components. The ISLLC standards, PSEL, and the newly drafted NELP standards are compared in Table 1.

Table 1

ISLLC vs. PSEL vs. NELP Standards

Standard	ISLLC	PSEL	NELP
1	Vision	Mission, vision and core Values	Vision, mission, and core values
2	School culture and instruction program	Ethics and professional norms	Ethics and professional norms
3	Management of the organization	Equity and cultural responsiveness	Equity and cultural leadership
4	Collaboration and mobilizing resources	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Instructional leadership
5	Ethics	Community of care and support for students	Community and external leadership
6	Political, social, economic, legal, and cultural	Professional capacity of school personnel	Operations management
7		Professional community for teachers and staff	Building professional capacity
8		Meaningful engagement of families and community	The internship
9		Operations and management	
10		School improvement	

Note. Adapted from the ISLLC standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2001), PSEL (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), and the NELP standards (Young, Perrone, Crow, & Whiteman, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

In a review of the history of the principalship and the evolution of the standards created to guide principals as they lead schools, principal preparation programs have not advanced far enough to equip graduating students with the skills, knowledge, and

resources needed for the demands of the new principal paradigm (George W. Bush Institute, 2016).

University principal preparation programs struggle to develop principal leadership programming to effectively equip graduates for the rigors of educational leadership due to lack of relevant curricular resources, variation of research course requirements, low threshold demands, outdated teaching methods, and the noticeable gap between working in the field and university principal preparation programming (Crow & Rodney, 2016; Nir, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The success of students graduating from today's schools are critically linked to the leadership abilities of the principal leading and supporting their teachers. The skills and knowledge of effective leadership strategies are developed as graduate students progress through their college or university principal leadership certification programs. While the documented effect a principal has on student learning and achievement is evident in research, research on the best ways to effectively prepare principals for the rigors of educational leadership is sparse and lacks consensus (Hemmer et al., 2013; McCarthy, 2014). Specific to the current study, research was conducted to understand how novice administrators feel their principal preparation programming equipped them for the leadership responsibilities of educational leadership in today's schools as outlined by newly drafted NELP standards.

Research Questions

The following question guided the study.

Primary Research Question.

In what ways are graduates from a regional university's principal preparation program equipped with the leadership skills and experiences necessary to successfully function as an instructional leader in today's challenging school environment?

The primary question is explored through the lens of two subsidiary questions.

Subsidiary Question 1.

Does the university's content and program design support acquisition of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Leadership Standards identified in the literature: (1) mission, vision, and improvement; (2) ethics and professional norms; (3) equity, inclusiveness, and cultural responsiveness; (4) learning and instruction; (5) community and external leadership; (6) operations and management; (7) building professional capacity; and (8) internship for novice administrators?

Subsidiary Question 2.

How do recent graduates who attended a regional university perceive the relative strengths and weaknesses of their principal preparation program?

Methods and Procedures

The focus of this qualitative case study is on principal preparation at a regional university. The research conducted in this study centers around recent graduates' perceptions of their principal preparation programming to determine if the programming is effective in preparing graduates to become successful principals in 21st-century schools. The study reviewed multiple administrators' perspectives (n = 4) of their

leadership training experiences gained through their university principal preparation program. An analysis of the four novice administrators' experiences and perceptions were examined through a review of survey responses (TELL Kentucky) and semi-structured interviews. The data gained from the surveys and interviews were collected and organized into the following categories:

- Rigor and Relevance
- Faculty Quality
- Peer Relationships
- Program Accessibility
- Internship/Residency Design and Quality
- Ethical and Professional Norms
- Strategic Leadership
- Operations and Management
- Instructional Leadership
- Professional and Organizational Culture
- Supportive and Equitable Learning Environment
- Family and Community Relations

The data gathered through the TELL Kentucky Survey instrument and interviews were evaluated to determine how the participants' university principal preparation programming aligned with current research and theories on effective leadership, as illustrated in Table 2. The newly drafted 2018 NELP standards served as the criteria to determine participant preparedness for this study.

Table 2

Research Study Design

Data	Source of Data	Instrumentation
School Performance	1st Year Administrators	TELL Kentucky Survey
	School Faculty	
Leadership Ability and Learning Outcomes	1st Year Administrators	TELL Kentucky Survey
	School Faculty	Interviews
Rigor and Relevance	1st Year Administrators	Interviews
Faculty Quality	1st Year Administrators	Interviews
Peer Relationships	1st Year Administrators	Interviews
Program Accessibility	1st Year Administrators	Interviews
Internship/Residency Design and Quality	1st Year Administrators	Interviews

Credibility

To assist in enhancing the credibility of the study, thereby addressing some of the concerns of transferability, protocols were followed regarding the populations, settings, and treatment arrangements. The researcher utilized the following strategies to maintain credibility during the study:

1. The survey instrument used, TELL Kentucky, is a research-validated instrument administered by an outside agency. The outside agency compiled the results to create the summary findings report.
2. The *seven stages of an interview inquiry*, as detailed by (Brinkmann, 2014), were adhered to during the interview process. A focus group from a panel of

experts from Green River Regional Education Cooperative (GRREC) assembled to determine the content validity of the interview questions before conducting the actual interview with selected administrators. Patton (2002) stated that focus groups consisted of a panel of experts that were well-informed about the nature of the study and able to represent diverse positions related to the study. Focus groups also serve to assist with triangulation and validity checking (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were conducted utilizing a semi-structured interview process. The researcher formulated the purpose of the investigation and designed the study. The researcher then interviewed the participants utilizing a reflective approach. The researcher utilized an outside entity to transcribe the interview. Once the transcription was completed, the researcher coded and analyzed the interview material. Follow-up interviews were conducted as needed to understand and develop further the patterns that emerged when initial interviews were coded and analyzed. The researcher verified the data through fact-checking against the TELL Kentucky survey results. Finally, the researcher reported the findings through this research study.

3. Member checks verified the accuracy of the transcription and served to validate the authenticity of information gathered during the interviews.
4. NVIVO (version 11.4.4), qualitative data analysis computer software, provided the platform necessary to analyze the data gained from the surveys and interviews, allowing for a deeper understanding of administrators'

perceptions of their principal preparation program and possible pattern recognition.

5. All biases of the researcher had been previously exposed and were regularly visited throughout the study to guard against the possibility of the biases skewing the overall finding of the study.

Dependability

Dependability, or the term *reliability* used more readily in quantitative research, gives confidence to the reader that the procedures utilized in the study can be replicated on other subjects to generate similar results (Creswell, 2013). An audit trail was maintained in the researcher's files, listing the location, dates, and times of the participant interviews to establish the dependability of the data and findings. Digital recordings of the interviews were kept along with copies of the transcribed interviews in a secured second location via an encoded flash drive to ensure confidentiality and no loss of data during the study. Also, a backup copy of NVIVO was stored in an encrypted secure file format in a separate location along with interview protocols, correspondence, and survey data. All participant data coded into NVIVO for analysis was stripped of any identifying markers with references to each participant and placed in a secure vault stored in a separate location from the encoded data.

Data Analysis

The case study's strength is enhanced by the researcher's ability to include multiple forms of evidence to address the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). Inductive data analysis was used to process the various amounts of data. Inductive data analysis requires the researcher to unitize and categorize the data. Unitizing is the process of

coding information obtained through surveys, interviews, or other sources of data that transforms the coded information into separate units with related meanings. Categorizing involves taking the data that has been initially coded into separate units and identifying patterns among the data that could be used to create categories (Creswell, 2013).

Inductive analysis was used in this study to examine novice administrators' perceptions of their principal leadership program from the lens of four different administrators. To consistently apply coding schemes to data and monitor any inconsistencies, specific protocols were followed as summarized by Creswell (2013):

Step 1 – Create open codes in NVIVO, noting any relationships that emerge.

Step 2 – Review relationships that emerge and build common categories recognizing patterns or themes across data.

Step 3 – Interpreting the results and making comparisons.

Step 4 – Explaining the results.

Researcher Bias

As the sole researcher for this study, the researcher served as the primary instrument to collect and analyze data through the development of the literature review, to review the survey results, and to interact with the selected administrators during interviews. The researcher is currently a sitting principal within the geographic region that the regional university serves and, as such, might feel a need to skew the data to highlight the pressures and expectations administrators face with limited resources to fully support the mandates stemming from political agendas. Also, the researcher is currently enrolled in a doctoral educational leadership program, leading him to disregard

any information that may paint any university in a negative light. Acknowledging these two biases as the researcher decided on methodology and framework, collected data, analyzed data, and stated conclusions on the data were vital to protect this study against the possibility of biases skewing the overall findings of this research study.

Definitions of Concepts and Terms

The following are definitions and abbreviations or acronyms relevant to the study:

Cohort – A group of students who work through a curriculum together to achieve the same academic degree together.

INSPIRE-G Survey Item Matrix – Designed to assess graduates’ perceptions about their leadership preparation experiences, learning outcomes, and career intentions by utilizing four broad components: Program Quality and Experiences, Learning Outcomes, Preparation for Leadership Practices, and Beliefs about the Principalship.

ISLLC – The Inter-State Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) policy standards, updated in 2008, provide state and district leaders guidance through six standards that outline what principals should be able to demonstrate consistently to strengthen organizations, support teachers, lead instruction, and advance student learning.

NELP – The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards, which align to the PSEL, serve a distinct purpose in that they provide specificity around performance expectations from beginning level building and district leaders. The NELP standards specify what novice leaders and program graduates should know and be able to do as a result of completing a high-quality educational leadership preparation program (Young, 2017).

Novice Administrator – A school administrator (functioning in the assistant principal or counselor role) who has less than two years of experience in an administrative role at a K-12 school.

PSEL – The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), formerly known as the ISLLC standards, are student-centered standards outlining foundational principles of leadership to guide the practice of educational leaders so they can create student success with more effective outcomes.

Seminal Research – A study that is influential because it spans several years of research, providing new unique insights, methodologies, or results.

TELL Kentucky Survey – Provides educators with data, tools, and direct support to facilitate school improvement. The survey is administered on a biennial basis to school personnel and includes questions on the following:

- Community Engagement and Support
- Teacher Leadership
- School Leadership
- Managing Student Conduct
- Use of Time
- Professional Development
- Facilities and Resources
- Instructional Practices and Support
- New Teacher Support

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a regional university's principal preparation programming in preparing graduates for the rigors of educational leadership in today's schools. Using case study methodology and Systems Theory as the conceptual framework, the researcher developed a multiple-case study from four unique perceptions of novice administrators. The researcher utilized a survey matrix created by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), the INSPIRE-G Survey Item Matrix, and the newly drafted National Educational Leadership Preparation standards (NELP) to design interview questions to be asked of recent graduates from a regional university's principal preparation program. Interviews were then conducted with four participants utilizing the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Kentucky survey to validate their school's success and teachers' perceptions of the administrator's leadership abilities, building a unique case for each participant. Follow-up interviews were conducted as needed to add depth to the participants' perceptions regarding their principal preparation experiences. The researcher then analyzed each of the cases individually and then collectively looking for common themes and patterns that corresponded to the research questions.

In the next section, Chapter 2, the researcher provides a literary review of leadership standards, history of the principalship, effective features of principal preparation programs, and General Systems Theory. Following Chapter 2, the researcher reviews the methodology of the study in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the researcher records and reports on the data collected for each of the participants. The study concludes with

Chapter 5, in which the researcher analyzed the data and reports any conclusion drawn from the data.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Perhaps there has been no greater need for effective school leadership than there is today in the current climate of high stakes accountability and increased public scrutiny of educational decisions made in public schools (Cuban, 2013; Nir, 2013). Manna (2015) states that “Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related influences on student success” (2015, p. 5). Educational professionals rely on university leadership programs to give them the tools and skills required to be effective leaders, as outlined by the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards (Young, 2017).

This study will take a detailed look at the principal preparation programming through the perceptions of graduates serving as novice administrators. To acquire an understating of principal leadership, past and current leadership standards, economic and political movements that have shaped principal expectations, and critical features of principal preparation programs, this review of literature contains four sections.

The review begins with a brief historical review of leadership standards that have guided principal preparation programs and principals who provide educational leadership to schools. This section concludes with the evolution of the newly adopted National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards. The next section ties events over the last century that have shaped the current understanding of educational leadership, reviewing past and current leadership theories to the NELP standards. The following section examines the critical features of effective principal preparation programs, giving examples of components of quality programs and current issues plaguing university

principal preparation programs. Finally, the review of the literature concludes with a brief examination of Systems Theory as the conceptual framework for the study.

Overview of Existing Research

There have been several research studies conducted over the years related to leadership standards, principal leadership, and principal preparation programs. Research conducted by the George W. Bush Institute (2016), Alahmadi (2016), Morrow (2003), Levine (2005), and RAND Education (2017) examined the impact principal leadership and principal preparation programs have on student achievement. The following information is a brief overview of the research conducted focusing on leadership standards, principal leadership, and principal preparation.

G.W. Bush Institution's (2016) analysis looked at the effectiveness of educational leaders from five principal preparation programs. The results of 68 interviews conducted by principals who graduated from the five select programs yielded the following key findings:

1. District and preparation programs lacked high-quality data on principal characteristics and placements.
2. Selected program graduates generally had positive perceptions of program coursework and hands-on experiences, but they have mixed perceptions of district supports and ongoing support from their programs.
3. Little consistent evidence supports increased student achievement between graduates and non-program graduates.
4. A significant variation occurred in effectiveness among principals from selected and other programs. (p. 7)

Morrow's (2003) qualitative study examined the perceptions of 182 Illinois public school principals related to which of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards they found to be most critical to achieving success in today's educational school setting. The study also examined the importance of the ISLLC

standards to principal preparation programs, which are transferable to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) as well as the new National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards for Building Level Leaders. The study concluded that the principals understanding of the ISLLC standards proved to be critical to obtaining and maintaining success, noting two additional findings that are pertinent to this study: (1) there is a shift in the principal's roles from building resource manager to instructional leader, and (2) the principal's ability to create a vision understood by all stakeholders is critical to achieving any level of sustainable success.

Levine's (2005) qualitative study spanned four years and included 28 schools chosen to reflect the current diversity in schools across the nation. The data collected over the four years of the study led to the overall conclusion that principal preparation programs at the university level were poor, with many ranging from inadequate to appalling in their ability to effectively prepare graduates for the rigors of the principalship. Two notable results from the surveys emerged: (1) only 6% of faculty teaching principals have ever held the position of principal, and (2) 89% of surveyed principals felt their university principal preparation program inadequately prepared them for the rigors associated with the principalship.

RAND's (2017) report was conducted in collaboration with the Wallace Foundation. The study analyzed the costs associated with creating and maintaining principal pipelines in six large urban districts. The study was conducted over a five-year period and included surveys and in-depth interviews as part of their data collection. While the study was organized to illustrate the costs of operating and maintaining principal pipelines, it yielded information that is important to this study in the

understanding that of all the funds spent by districts, only .04% went to activities meant to support principals. The lack of funding at the district level highlights the importance of quality university-led principal preparation programs in equipping today's principals for the challenges associated with educational leadership.

Focus of the Review

Research findings spanning different schools, countries, and cultures draw similar conclusions that principals with effective instructional leadership skillsets lead schools that make a difference in students' learning (McCarthy, 2014; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The documented effect a principal has on student achievement and teacher effectiveness is evident throughout published research (Herman et al., 2017); however, published research on the best ways to effectively prepare principals for the rigor of educational leadership is sparse (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; McCarthy, 2014). According to Tubbs, Heard, and Epps (2011), Davis & Darling-Hammond (2012), and Levine (2005), principal preparation programs have failed to prepare new principals for the demands of leading a school in the 21st century. The current study utilizes the guide and framework for writing literature reviews outlined by Gavan (2009). The review of literature related to leadership standards, principal effectiveness, and principal preparation programs serves as the foundation for the current research study.

Literature Search Methods

The literature review was culled from several databases housed in Western Kentucky University's online library. The prominent databases utilized were the following:

- EBSCOhost

- ProQuest, and
- SAGE Educational Collection

The review focused on:

- Leadership standards
- Educational leadership
- Principal preparation programs, and
- Systems Theory

Once the search parameters were entered, it was evident that the fields needed to be narrowed due to a large number of initial results. Key word identifiers were initially used to identify quality literature and studies as well as selecting only material that was peer-reviewed. Several studies were selected in the first round of selection utilizing only this criterion. An additional criterion was added, *time period*, to further narrow down the list of results and to generate research more relevant to current issues of principal leadership. The narrowing of the time period to the year 2010 or newer also yielded material that was current with the new leadership standards, techniques for teaching leadership skill sets, and principal preparation programming. Only research published before 2010 was included in the study if the research met the criteria of seminal research.

It is important to note that during the analysis of each paper, article, book, and study selected, a review of the references was conducted to identify additional resources that could enhance the quality of the study. This process assisted the reviewer in finding pertinent information centered on the topic of leadership standards, educational leadership, and principal preparation programs.

Leadership Standards

The conditions and characteristics of children educated in the public school system are ever-changing, creating myriad challenges for today's educational leader. Professional standards for educational leaders that outline foundational principals of leadership to guide the practice of today's educational leaders are critical to student success (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Manna, 2015; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The need for such standards caused the Chief State School Officers to publish the first standards for educators in 1996, followed by an update in 2008 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). These standards provided the framework for policy on education leadership in all but five states and had come to be a benchmark for principal evaluations across the country (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Earlier standards also provided the foundation for the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and the newly developed National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Program Recognition Standards (Murphy et al., 2017; Young, 2017).

Interstate School Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards

The establishment of the ISLLC standards, grounded in research, set the norms for knowledge, skills, and general leadership abilities for school administrators tied to the principles of effective teaching and learning (Seybert, 2007). Several studies have come out that measure the relevancy of the principal profession to the ISLLC standards, e.g. (Gagliardi, 2012; Hart, 2015). Studies conducted agree that the responsibilities of the principalship have increased over the years, encompassing far more than the original principalship framework conceived. One study (Morrow, 2003) examined centered on

how principals perceived the ISLLC standards through surveys, drawing two conclusions that are related to this study: (1) the managerial role of the principal had shifted from a building administrator to more of an instructional leader, and (2) a clear vision for learning was the principal's responsibility to create and effectively communicate to all of the stakeholders if they were to be successful. Principals surveyed agreed that the understanding of creating a vision that could be understood by all stakeholders was not only vital to their success but needed to be viewed by universities as critical to ensuring inclusion into principal preparation programs. The ISLLC standards consisted of six standards and 31 functions broken down in Table 3. There were four reform strategies that were developed to ensure that the standards led to reaching the goal of changing the focus of the principalship from management to learning: (1) adoption of the standards nationwide, (2) redesigning principal preparation programs at the university level, (3) reconstruction of professional development for school and district administration, and (4) districts and states to align their evaluation systems to ISLLC standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). However, with global market pressures forcing schools to look for new and innovative ways to teach students the skills necessary to be competitive in this dynamic workforce, changes to educational practices and the standards governing those practices were necessary. Expanding knowledge and educational research laid the groundwork for new standards to guide their practice (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The ISLLC standards were a good start, but still enforced the legitimate power held in place by the policies that force assessment to still drive instruction (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Seybert, 2007).

Table 3

ISLLC Standards

Standard 1: An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.

Standard 2: An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Standard 3: An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4: An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5: An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 6: An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Note. Adapted from ISLLC 2008.

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) are designed to ensure that educational leaders are ready to effectively meet the demands and challenges of leading a school that prepares students for today's challenging careers (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), the PSEL uses ISLLC as a starting point but shifts the focus more towards student learning, listing foundational principles to guide educational leaders, ensuring each child is well-educated and prepared for the 21st century (2015). Figure 1 depicts the relationship of the interdependent domains to the school leadership qualities and values integral to student learning.

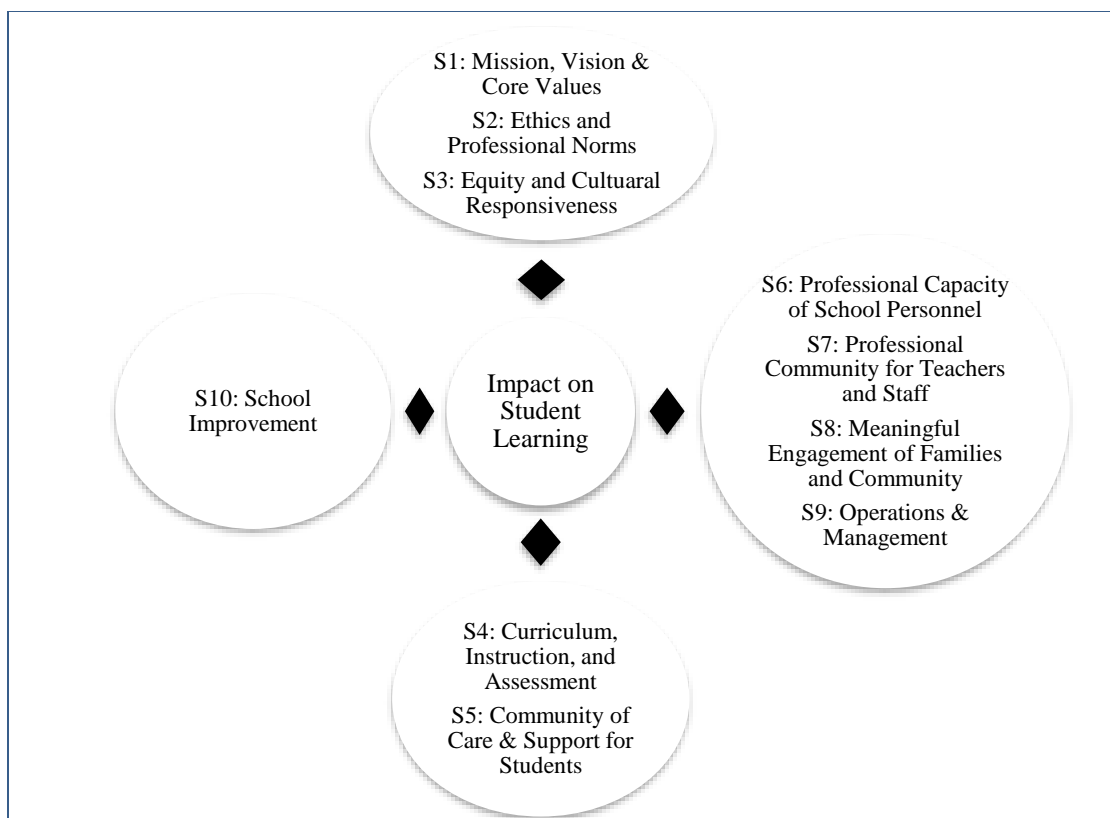


Figure 1. PSEL Domains Depicting the Relationship of School Leadership Work to Student Learning. Adapted from National Policy for Educational Administration 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders.

NPBEA designed the new standards to also serve as a guide for principal preparation programs to assist the colleges and universities in identifying and developing the specific knowledge and skillsets required of educational leaders in today's schools (Manna, 2015; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Syed, 2015). The link between professional standards and leadership programming is illustrated in Figure 2.

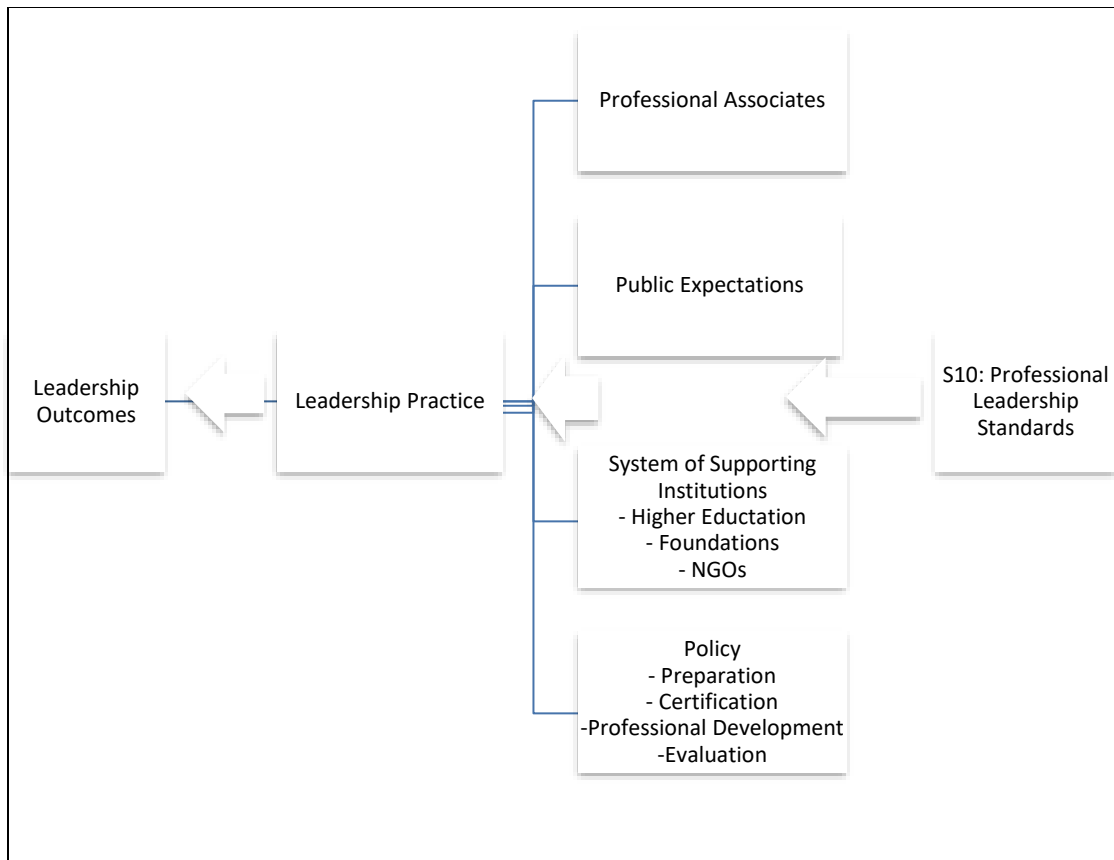


Figure 2. Theory-of-Action of the Role of Professional Standards in Leadership Practices and Outcomes. Adapted from National Policy for Educational Administration 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders.

The ISLLC and PSEL standards set the stage for the newly designed National Educational Leadership Preparation Standards (NELP) as principal and educational leaders looked for more specific standards to address the various leadership positions.

National Educational Leadership Preparation Standards (NELP)

Professional standards that are student-centered, providing concise and clear direction for educational leaders trying to lead their school, are critical to student and, subsequently, professional success (Manna, 2015; McCarthy, 2014; Mendels, 2016; Syed, 2015). The NELP standards were designed to create standards that are more specific to each leadership position, providing more clarity and focus on the standards driving

principals (Young, 2017). While PSEL creates a set of 10 standards to guide educators, NELP standards are limited to 8 standards. One set of standards addresses the needs of the principal while another set of 8 standards address district leadership. Specifically, the new NELP standards offer six characteristics that give more guidance for educational leaders:

- Aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)
- Offers standards unique to Building and District Leaders
- Unpacks the content and experiences for each of the standards as well as their components
- Provides an overview of the research supporting the standards
- Provides crosswalks to the PSEL and the Education Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards
- Offers rubrics to assist in principal assessment

The draft NELP Standards for principals focus on eight critical attributes (Young, 2017):

1. Vision, Mission, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Leadership
4. Instructional Leadership
5. Community and External Leadership
6. Operations and Management
7. Building Professional Capacity
8. The Internship

Having professional standards that are clear and concise, focused on the role and responsibilities of a building principal, are critical to the success for new educational leaders as they provide a roadmap to circumnavigate the challenges associated with the principalship (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Herman et al., 2017; Manna, 2015; Palmer, 2017).

Historical Perspective of Principal Leadership

The expectations of school leaders have shifted and evolved over the past two decades “Principals are bearing more and more weight as old responsibilities persist and as new ones become layered on top of them” (Manna, 2015, p. 11). The research supports that the position in the school that is most likely to increase student achievement, second only to the classroom teacher, is the principal (Kafka, 2009). While the research identifies the principal as one of the most significant factors in student achievement (George W. Bush Institute, 2016; Herman et al., 2017; Kaufman et al., 2017), the research does not unify around the definition of a principal. Principalship and Leadership are often used interchangeably in conversations involving schools and education. Principals have always been expected to wear many hats and fill many roles around school reform. Principals are expected to develop a vision, provide ethical norms, lead with equity, establish a culture of learning, provide instructional leadership, provide community leadership, and manage the building all while building the professional capacity of staff (Kafka, 2009). Although there have been many reviews of the research surrounding leadership, no defining or universal trait has surfaced that distinguishes effective leaders from ineffective leaders (Dembowski, 2010). Leadership is difficult to define because it lacks tangibility and can look drastically different in one organization when compared to another organization

(Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Most of the disagreement surrounding leadership stems from the fact that leadership is a complex phenomenon involving the leader, the followers, and the solution. There are multiple factors that affect leadership as well as different perspectives from which to view it (Wren, 1995). As we look at today's view of the principalship, leadership expectations of principals consist of

. . . bureaucratic, managerial, instructional, and community responsibilities. They were expected to lead and instruct teachers, to monitor students, to communicate with the district, and to work with parents and members of the wider community. Moreover, they were seen as pivotal figures in any school reform effort. For many observers at the time, the principal *was* the school. (Kafka, 2009, p.324)

Principal as a Program Manager

While the principal has always been a multifaceted position in the school, the primary responsibilities of a principal from the 1920s until the 1960s could best be described as that of an administrative manager charged with building operations, management of staff, working with the community, and providing external leadership (Dembowski, 2010; Herman et al., 2017; Kafka, 2009). “The imperatives of control and accountability for resources and activities dominated public and institutional concerns, resulting in an emphasis on restraint and containment rather than on empowerment, initiative, and creative development” (Dembowski, 2010, pp. 4-5). Program management focuses on the business side, pulling from the traditional viewpoint of management in education such as planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and measuring outputs. They are typically described as the *hard skills* of management (Dembowski, 2010). The research concludes that the management skills necessary for principals to maintain control of the school required a focus on efficiency and translating the strategic vision into attainable objectives required to reach established goals (Dembowski, 2010).

While there were calls for principals to be more focused on instruction during this period, the demands requiring direct and indirect interactions with staff, parents, and students limited principals' ability to engage in the instructional effectiveness of staff and programs (Kafka, 2009).

French and Raven's (1959) research concluded that leadership could be broken down into two categories: positional power and personal power. The obtaining of personal power occurs by the person's ability to influence others around through reference or expertise, while positional power occurs when people follow based on rank or office held by the leader. Positional power is also known as legitimate power, often achieved through reward or coercive activities. When principals would exhibit personal power, others would follow because they model qualities or characteristics that they also value, or more to the point, displayed dedication to a set of beliefs that others in the group hold to be crucial or vital to the group's survival. Principals could also hold knowledge or a skill set that separates them from others in the group giving them more innate value leading to higher placement in the leadership hierarchy (Dembowski, 2010; French & Raven, 1959).

The attainment of leadership through positional power occurs through several pathways. Principals could be leaders simply because of their title of *principal*, giving them automatic authority over people. Positional power can also be secured if the principal is in a position to offer rewards as an incentive for working hard or accomplishing a particular task well. The final categorization of positional power is that of coercion (French & Raven, 1959). When a principal applies undue pressure, or force, to an employee to remain loyal to them or to complete a particular task, then that is

deemed *coercive power*. Leaders who use coercion are interested in their own goals and seldom are interested in the wants and needs of subordinates (French & Raven, 1959). In either position, it is important to note that the curricular programs that the principals were managing during this period were designed and introduced by policymakers outside of the educational setting (Herman et al., 2017). In turn, many of the strategies that the principals utilized to implement these programs failed to materialize the growth at the rate intended by the curricular program and policy.

Principal as an Instructional Leader

As the 1970s came to a close and the 1980s came into view, the role of the principal transitioned from that of a manager tasked with planning, implementing, monitoring, and controlling activities centered on developing a budget, managing staff and systems, and coordinating resources. The responsibilities of the principal grew during this time period, with the school staff viewing the principal as the primary source of knowledge for the development of the school's educational program. The new responsibilities tasked the principal with serving as the instructional leader, modeling ethics, and establishing professional norms (Dembowski, 2010). As the shift from managerial leader to instructional leader occurred, there was a call for the enhancement of principal autonomy for the principals to effectively meet the new demands imposed on them (Kafka, 2009).

The school principal is the leader in the school involving improvement of the curriculum, and he/she must accept that responsibility in a diligent manner. The following are in-service education opportunities for all teachers, as well as the principal self-involvement in acquiring self-efficacy:

- workshops and faculty meetings
- attendance at state and national educational conventions including the National Association of Elementary Principals
- doing a research project pertaining to a facet of improving the curriculum

- working toward an advanced university degree in school administration
- reading and discussing recent journal articles. (Ediger, 2014, p. 267)

In the late 1970s, our ideals “... shifted from issues of equality to issues relating to excellence, accountability, and choice” (Fowler, 2013, p. 11). At the heart of this shift was the federal government that had made efforts to create a national standard for curriculum in every legislative session for nearly half a century. The federal government came under increasing pressure to increase student scores across the country to become more competitive globally. The comparison of each nation’s achievement results in reading and math played on a world stage created pressure that led to more direct federal influence in educational policy for states by tying requirements and restrictions to federal educational funding, believing federal influence would lead to increased test results (Hart, 2015). However, beginning in the 1980s, most federal education grants combined into block grants giving the states the flexibility to determine educational policy, free from federal influence. The autonomy that the states were vying for trickled down to the principal level placing the successes, as well as the failures, squarely on the shoulders of the principals (Ediger, 2014; Kafka, 2009).

A meta-analysis was conducted by (Waters et al., 2003) to identify and demonstrate the relationship a principal has on student achievement. While in this era of the principalship, new responsibilities manifested as attributes necessary to effectively lead a school. The results listed in Table 4 lists the top leadership responsibilities out of 21 responsibilities surveyed, and the average effect size for their impact on student achievement (Waters et al., 2003). The new leadership responsibilities and expectations led to the view of the principalship to evolve as key figures in the successful

implementation of the effective schools model (Corcoran, 2017). Policies governing education were evolving alongside the expectations of the principalship. The only way for many principals to meet the growing demands of educational reform placed on them by policies instituted [1965's The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), 1994's Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), 2001's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 2009's American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), and 2015's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)] was to learn new ways to manage their time and distribute leadership (Hemmer et al., 2013).

Table 4

Top Principal Leadership Responsibilities

Rank	Responsibilities	The extent to which the principal
1	Situational Awareness	is aware of the details & undercurrents in the running of the school & uses this information to address current & potential problems
2	Intellectual Stimulation	ensures that faculty & staff are aware of the most current theories & practices & makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture
3	Change Agent ^a	is willing to & actively challenges the status quo
3	Input ^a	involves teachers in the design & implementation of important decisions & policies
5	Culture	fosters shared beliefs & a sense of community & cooperation

Note. Adapted from "Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us about the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement," by T. Waters, R.J. Marzano, and B. McNulty, 2003, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, Copyright 2003 by McREL. ^a 'Input' and 'Change Agent' recorded an average *r* of .30.

While there have been several reports published over the last few decades, *A Nation At Risk* is one of the most influential reports to emerge on the status of education across America; no report has been as influential as the policies written in response to the

studies and report. Policymakers understood the importance of competent school leaders and framed the problem with school leadership as a lack of instructional and curriculum expertise (Hemmer et al., 2013). The lack of progress made under this model forced the principalship to once again transition to a leadership style that allowed principals to involve other staff and collectively take responsibility for the direction and ultimate success or failure of the school (Robinson et al., 2008).

Principal as a Transformational Leader

James Burns (as cited in Wren, 1995, pp. 100) defined leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values, and motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers.” Wren then went on to break leadership into two distinct styles, transactional and transformational, allowing principals to create equity and culture while building the professional capacity of his/her staff. While transactional leadership only exists because of a goal both parties agree to, transformational leadership is the style of leadership that endures past a singular goal that brings both the leader and the follower to higher levels of performance and aspiration.

Principals who understand transformation leadership understand how important every staff member is to the overall mission of student success. They form a symbiotic relationship with each other to change and transform the school (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Transformational leadership can only occur when principals engage in such a way that raises the staff to new levels they thought unattainable and in turn, raise the principals themselves to a new level of operational effectiveness (Wren, 1995). They are

. . . leaders as catalysts, leaders capable of deploying their ideas and themselves into some consonance and thereby committing themselves to a greater risk – the

exposure of intimacy that most of us emotionally yearn for, rhetorically defend, but in practice shun. At their best, these leaders – a fairly disparate group in many superficial ways – commit themselves to a common enterprise and are resilient enough to absorb the conflicts; brave enough, now and then, to be transformed by its accompanying energies; and capable of sustaining a vision that encompasses the whole organization. (Bennis & Nanus, 2007, pp. 201-202)

When society changed, and school leadership attempted to refocus the principalship towards becoming an instructional leader, principals instead ended up being regarded more as a manager or supervisor than the instructional leader students and staff sorely needed (Robinson et al., 2008). In neglecting the views of teachers, principals, and policymakers had serious credibility issues when looking at transforming teaching and learning (Cuban, 2013). To effectively change the culture of a school, allowing the attainment of agreed-upon goals, principals must step away from supervisory duties and work collaboratively with the staff to find solutions plaguing program and student success (Cuban, 2013; Robinson et al., 2008). Decisions that the principal previously shouldered by themselves now welcomed staff input before embarking on a new direction. This new leadership style hinged on principals and staff sharing a level of trust that was absent in prior models of leadership. It forced the principal not only to be seen as the leader but a participant in joint development of activities reinforcing the symbiotic relationship that underpins transformation leadership (Bennis, 2007; Wren, 1995).

Effective Features of Principal Preparation Programs

Student success is tethered to the leadership and decision making abilities of the school's principal (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Syed, 2015). Schools find themselves in desperate need of leaders trained to handle the myriad of challenging issues that encompass educational leadership in today's schools (Levine, 2005; Seybert, 2007). Waters et al. (2003) conducted a study of leadership

effects on student achievement. The meta-analysis reviewed more than 5,000 studies conducted over the last 30 years. The study concluded that principals can positively affect student achievement and found that student success directly correlated to the leadership skills and abilities of the principal. The principal's leadership skills and knowledge are learned and honed in principal preparation programs with the quality of the principal directly linked to the quality of the principal preparation program at colleges and universities (Levine, 2005; Wilson, 2014).

Types of Studies

Several research studies published over the years examined principal preparation programming as it has developed over the last several decades. This review analyzed 18 different studies that spanned across the continental United States and one study looking abroad to Saudi Arabia and Canada to maintain an international balance of types of leadership preparation programs. The majority of the studies reviewed (6 out of 18) utilized a qualitative format research design to conduct the study. Five of the 18 studies reviewed utilized a mixed-methods format, while 4 of the 18 used a quantitative format research design. An individual case study, a literature review, and a document review were included in this review due to their relevance to the current study.

The first qualitative study reviewed was a descriptive case study, used when the researcher wants to arrive at a deeper understanding of a particular issue or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Rossman, 2011; Stake, 1995; Wilson, 2006). The data obtained during a qualitative study are utilized to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships previously unknown to exist. The second qualitative study reviewed was a grounded theory study. Grounded theory provides the researcher

with systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to move beyond description and discover a new theory that explains the collected data (Creswell, 2013; Taylor-Backor, 2013). The third qualitative study reviewed was a historiography study. “Historical research traditions articulate procedures to enhance the credibility of statements about the past, to establish relationships, and to determine possible cause-and-effect relationships” (Rossman, 2011, p. 185). The fourth type of qualitative study reviewed was a multiple-case study. A multiple-case study approach afforded the research with an opportunity to examine existing factors unique to each program and similar or contrasting factors across programs (Burks, 2014; Stake, 1995). The fifth type of study reviewed was a non-experimental, ex-post-facto (causal-comparative) design study. This research design allowed for the control of the intervening variables (relational and organizational supports) and covariate variables during the analysis (Patton, 2002). In this particular study, the relationship analyzed was that between or among principal preparation and principal education level on student achievement (Schaffer, 2015). The final qualitative study (Brewster, 2015) explored how individuals perceive the efficacy of their educational preparation programming and experiences related to their confidence as literacy leaders at their school.

The mixed-methods studies reviewed differed from one another in the way of design and data collection. The mixed-methods case study (Franklin, 2006) used a dominant-less dominant mixed-method design, with qualitative inquiry as the dominant method and quantitative analysis as the less dominant method. The study analyzed two principal preparation programs exploring their impacts on graduate job attainment and graduates’ perceptions of their preparation. One study utilized a mixed-methods

comparative study adapted to expand the scope of the study, along with improving the analytical power of the study (Alahmadi, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The study encompassed two principal preparation programs, identifying and capturing strengths from both programs. Another mixed-methods research study (Nir, 2013) offered the combination of the two research stages and methods in a linear, multistage research approach, whereby the qualitative part serves as grounds for the quantitative research method to identify gaps and create a model for principal preparation in Israel. The final mixed-methods causal-comparative and interview-based study reviewed (Gagliardi, 2012) chose this method of research to achieve an in-depth understanding of how graduates perceived their level of preparedness for the principalship. The design of the study allowed for an in-depth understanding of the research problem by triangulating data from both broad numeric trends from quantitative research and the detail of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

There were four quantitative studies selected for this review. The Delphi Technique of quantitative study (Harrison, 1993) utilized three general features to identify a method for improved decision making. The three general features were anonymous response, iteration and controlled feedback, and statistical group response. The causal-comparative experimental research quantitative study (Wright, 2014) involved testing a hypothesis and providing descriptive of results about the effects of principal training. Another quantitative study (Fuller, Young, & Baker, 2011) utilized least squares regression whereby all measures were aggregated, choosing to focus on the school level rather than the student, teacher, or classroom level. This particular focus was chosen because the principal operates at the school level and controls the qualifications of

the entire team of teachers hired and retained during that principal's tenure. The final quantitative study (Wilson, 2014) utilized a researcher-designed instrument to review principal management.

The other studies selected for this review were an article based on document review (Tubbs et al., 2011), individual case descriptions with cross-case analysis (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), and a literature review (Crow, 2016). While these studies did not follow any formal research design, the information contained in the studies is relevant to the topic of the current study.

Methods Reviewed and Studies Used to Collect Information

Each study reviewed collected information revolving around principal preparation programs and principal leadership. In the qualitative studies, data were collected through surveys, interviews, document analysis, literature reviews, and questionnaires. Each survey/questionnaire took on a different format based on the needs of the study. Some interviews were semi-structured, while others were open-ended to provide more in-depth information. Regarding the document analysis, archival data, program documents, and educational records were some of the documents obtained for review. One study utilized the MANCOVA statistical method for analyzing data when reviewing the results of their questionnaire.

The methods used to collect data in the mixed-method studies were interviews, surveys, document analysis, focus group interviews, and questionnaires. The interviews ranged from semi-structured individual and group interviews to face-to-face with the questions mailed to each participant before the actual interview. The documents reviewed during a document analysis were archival data, program documents, and existing data

files. Surveys utilized a multiple-choice, dichotomously answered via a 5-point Likert scale or a pre-engineered survey consisting of two parts: demographic, with the second part divided into six subsections derived from ISLLC standards.

The quantitative studies captured data using surveys and document analysis. The surveys were an anonymous response, iteration and controlled feedback, statistical group response, and one-way analysis of variance employing MANCOVA and ANCOVA tests.

Shortfalls of Principal Preparation Programs

There exists a severe need for leaders who possess both the skill and the knowledge to be educational leaders of a school, as well as managers of the facility (McCarthy, 2014; Young, 2017). Wilson (2014) concluded that, despite colleges acknowledging the level of importance the principal plays in the success of students, the preparation of school principals has proven to be subpar in equipping school leaders for their roles in today's schools. As each researcher evaluated the various principal preparation programs, several themes emerged as areas where programs could strengthen program components to better prepare principal leaders for the daunting tasks associated with school leadership in today's challenging educational arena.

Crow (2016) cited a lack of curriculum cohesiveness, a variation of research course requirements, and minimal emphasis as shortfalls of the principal preparation programs reviewed. Nir (2013) cited lack of reality-based relevant contents, low threshold demands, outdated curricula, outdated teaching methods, lack of use of methodical assessment in technology, and the gap between working in the field and the prep programs as reasons that the principal preparation programs fail to produce qualified and equipped leaders. Alahmadi (2016) added that a lack of satisfactory cohort structure

reported by students as one of the primary factors limiting success in their new leadership roles. Wilson (2014) reported that the research incorporated in the teachings is detached from practice, adding that there is insufficient attention paid to components of clinical education and mentorship in the principal preparation programs. Hart (2015) summed up the Commonwealth's position with regard to its principal preparation programs by stating, "Throughout Kentucky there is not enough emphasis on continuous improvement to better equip principals with the tools to manage effective meeting, team building and group dynamics, develop effective mission and vision statements, define current process, problem identification tools, (etc.)" (p. 145).

Strengths of Principal Preparation Programs

While the majority of the studies reviewed agreed with the shortfalls of principal preparation programs, several studies also commented on principal preparation programs' areas of strength. It is the identification and understanding of program strengths that provide the momentum necessary to conduct the critical review necessary to move a program to better serve the needs of the local area (Weiss, 1998). Only then can the rebuilding occur, allowing a more responsive and effective principal preparation program to emerge (Hall, 2013).

A common strength among the principal preparation programs reviewed was the cohort model. One of the benefits noted from the cohort structure, as stated by Welch (2010), was that programs focused on social justice and the moral and ethical consideration of leadership supported by the accountability inherent in cohort models of learning. Tubbs et al. (2011) cited field experiences, professional guest speakers, hands-on activities, case studies, simulations, professional associations, and resources as

positive components of principal preparation programs. Wilson (2014) stated that effective principal preparation programs are research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, are structured to enable collaborative activity between program and area schools, and have a rigorous candidate selection process. Harrison (1993) stated that good principal preparation programs need to shift from theory to practice-orientated programs and cautioned that “full-time internships, while desirable, should not take the place of experiential learning throughout the principal preparation process” (p. 104).

Effective Features of Principal Program Review Conclusions

The review of prior studies of college and university-based principal preparation programs was conducted to obtain a sense of how other principal preparation programs prepared their students for the rigors of educational leadership. The common component that kept emerging from the studies as critical to the success of principal preparation programs was the cohort model for learning. While this component was not indicative of all the reviews, it manifested with enough consistency to warrant specific attention as an element to ensure inclusion in any principal preparation program. Perhaps Crow (2016) said it most appropriately when he stated, “Standards and policies for leadership preparation programs are only effective if they are based on what we know about both what is happening and what should be occurring in order to prepare effective, innovative change agents for schools” (p. 138).

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework, or theoretical framework, is critical in research studies to keep the study focused and is utilized to explain the research to the reader. Creating a

conceptual framework explains the research and why things are occurring the way they are within a study (Maxwell, 2013). Conceptual frameworks serve to bridge the gap between prior models with the ability to shape public arguments in a larger context to consider previously held beliefs (Patton, 2002). The conceptual framework can manifest in visual or a written form, graphically, or as a narrative that describes the actual ideas and beliefs held on the subject of study (Maxwell, 2013). In the case of the current study, the research has chosen to utilize both written form and visual form adapted from a conceptual model developed by Pounder (2012) that explored the relationship among leader preparation program characteristics and their first- and second-order outcomes.

General Systems Theory (GST)

The conceptual framework for this study was offered first by the Bertalanffy (1969), moving the theory from its original context of biological science, to be applied as a theory to study not only parts and processes of any system but also the complexities within an organization in an attempt to solve issues hindering operational efficiency. GST's defining features are that the system has numerous components and subsystems, has boundaries, must respond to issues of its surrounding environment, and requires communication to maintain order and possibly adapt to achieve stated goals (Bertalanffy, 1969). Placing a study within a design helps to highlight the specific design elements and causal links the study addresses to uncover the interdependent nature and interrelatedness of those systems (Kottkamp, 2011; Pounder, 2012). In the extension of the General Systems Theory to this study, the researcher plans to analyze recent graduate perceptions of a regional universities' principal preparation program.

Systems Theory

Systems Theory is a general theoretical approach that assumes that systems can be self-creating and self-organizing entities that combine to form an integrated, more complex system (Forsyth, 2010). The current research will utilize the Systems Theory to analyze the system within a bigger system, distinguishing patterns as it relates to the complexity of the whole system and addressing the potential of changing within the system. To understand the processes necessary for change, the researcher will utilize the Input-Process-Output model that links preparation program experiences, acknowledging existing conditions to the following: leadership behaviors and practices, teaching and learning conditions in the school, and finally school and student outcomes. The outcomes will account for factors outside of the principal's control to include student demographics and the percentage of novice teachers. Using this model, the input factors skill, experience, and training to influence the outputs through communication, planning conflict, and leadership (Forsyth, 2010). Figure 3 outlines this interdependence.

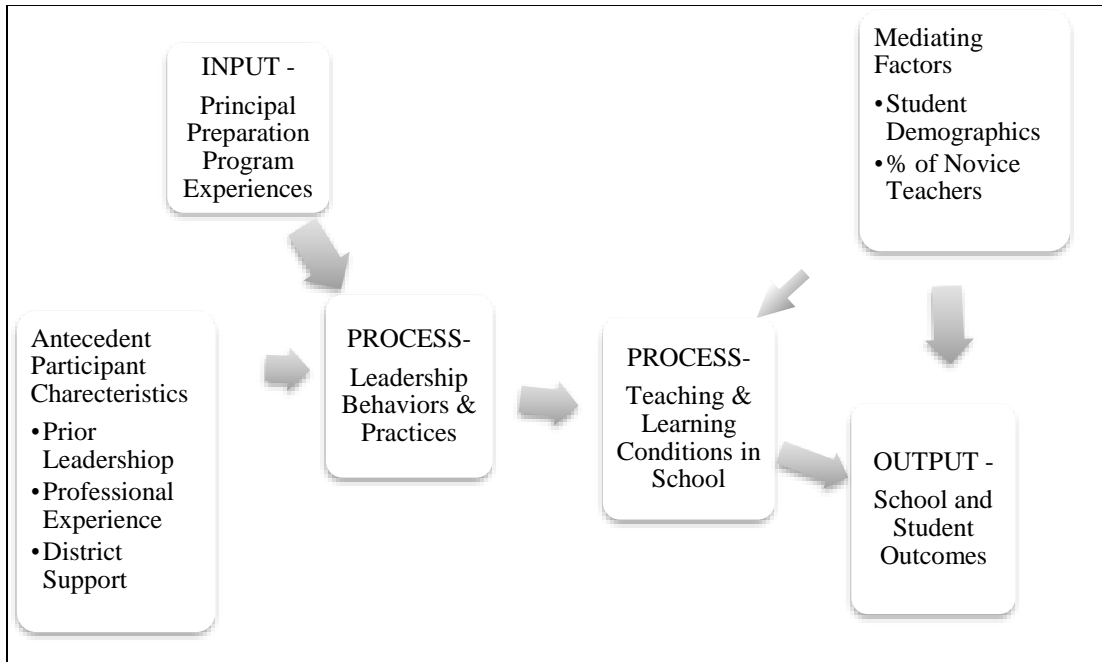


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework.

Chapter Summary

Current approaches employed by college and university-based principal preparation programs are often viewed as insufficient in equipping principals to lead today's schools. As the role of the principal continues to expand with increased levels of accountability, adding to the increased levels of social and political scrutiny in which school leaders must operate, preparation programs must refine program offerings to prepare educational leaders for the rigors of school principalship (George W. Bush Institute, 2016). Districts cannot afford the costs associated with placing poorly trained leaders in positions that require a leadership skill set capable of navigating through the tasks necessary to engender student success. The need for hiring qualified leaders requires districts to select principals with strong leadership skills capable of creating a vision that is not only understood but able to be achieved by all stakeholders (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Dembowski, 2010).

Learning needs to be viewed as a lifelong journey, capable of elevating not only the individual but the body of knowledge to new levels of understanding (Reeves, 2009). Educational researchers do not fully agree on which of the skills and traits a principal must possess are most critical to their success as an educational leader. However, one point where most researchers agree is that the leadership and managerial skills possessed must be utilized to achieve one altruistic goal: ensuring their school advances teaching and learning for all students (Dembowski, 2010; Manna, 2015; Syed, 2015). Colleges and universities must critically examine leadership programming, ensuring their programs are not static, but responsive to the times and settings principals working in today as well as tomorrow (Crow, 2016; Kaufman et al., 2017; Mendels, 2016).

This literature review serves to define and outline the leadership and managerial traits needed for today's principal to be an effective school leader. Bennis and Nanus (2007) claimed that leadership, as attested by powerful leaders and events throughout history, is never guaranteed and must always be renewed. So, too, should principal leadership programs. Just as the leadership standards have transitioned to respond to the different challenges, opportunities, and expectations of the principalship, so must principal preparation programs continue to transform learning in response to policy changes and societal expectations (Hall, 2013; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Young, 2017). Principal preparation programs are entrusted with the task of preparing future leaders for the critical task of educating future generations of scientists, mathematicians, writers, linguists, humanitarians, politicians, social workers, civil servants, military servicemen and women, teachers, and educational leaders (Crow, 2016). Principal preparation programs must adapt their programming to prepare their

graduates for the enormous task of successfully leading schools and preparing all students for success (Corcoran, 2017).

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AND METHODS

In this chapter, the design and methodology of the study are described, providing detail on how the designs and methodology support the purpose of the study. The use of surveys and interviews allow for a deeper understanding of how recent graduates from a principal preparation program perceived their readiness to effectively lead students, staff, and ultimately their school to success. Selected participants identified, in their voice and from their own experiences, aspects of their principal preparation program they feel prepared them for the rigors of educational leadership in today's schools as well as areas that fell short of equipping them for the challenges associated with being a school administrator. The data collected will yield deeper insight into characteristics of principal preparation programs that equip educational leaders for success during their first years as a novice administrator.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of recent graduates of a regional university's principal preparation program and describe whether the programming and leadership experiences gained through the principal preparation program adequately equipped them with the leadership skills needed to lead their schools successfully.

Research Question

According to Maxwell (2013), research questions are central to the purpose of the study, providing the focus for the research study. The following research questions provided the focus of this study.

Primary Research Question.

In what ways are graduates from a regional university's principal preparation program equipped with the leadership skills and experiences necessary to successfully function as an instructional leader in today's challenging school environment?

Subsidiary Question 1.

Does the university's content and program design support acquisition of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Leadership Standards identified in the literature: (1) mission, vision, and improvement; (2) ethics and professional norms; (3) equity, inclusiveness and cultural responsiveness; (4) learning and instruction; (5) community and external leadership; (6) operations and management; (7) building professional capacity; and (8) internship for novice administrators?

Subsidiary Question 2.

How do recent graduates who attended a regional university perceive the relative strengths and weaknesses of their principal preparation program?

Research Design

This study is a qualitative case study examining the effectiveness of one regional university's principal preparation program through the lens of novice administrators. Phenomenology was the first methodology to be considered to gain a generalized view of the effectiveness of the regional university's principal preparation programs on recent graduates' success in leadership roles. Upon further review of the primary question of the study, the researcher determined that phenomenology would not allow for measurement

of the attributes of a specific program and report on its ability to effectively prepare administrators for the rigors of school leadership. The researcher then selected a methodology that allowed a specific study on a bounded case, such as one regional university's principal preparation program. The researcher chose the approach of a qualitative case study research to align the research question with a research philosophy that relates to the nature of reality that manifests when different perceptions of research participants are reported. This philosophical assumption, known as *ontological*, relates to the nature of reality and the characteristics of this reality created by the participant's perceptions reported in the study (Creswell, 2013).

A qualitative case study should contain the following essential characteristics: (1) particularistic, (2) heuristic, (3) inductive, and (4) descriptive (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 1995). The particularistic characteristic speaks to a particular situation, event, or program. This study satisfies this characteristic because it focuses on one principal preparation program housed at a regional university. The heuristic characteristic of a qualified study ensures that the reader understands the phenomena outlined in the case study. In this study, the phenomena outlined in the literature review explains the difficulty with creating successful leadership programs across the United States and even expanding to programs outside the continental United States. The inductive characteristic examines the emerging patterns, themes, and concepts derived from the analysis of data. The backbone of this study necessitates the inductive examination of surveys and interviews to identify codes, themes, and categories that emerge in each of the principal cases allowing for cross-case analysis. The last characteristic of a qualified case study requires the study to be descriptive, providing the reader with thick and rich descriptions

of the studied phenomenon. The researcher provides a deep and thorough description of principal leadership standards, the history of principal leadership, and the essential qualities of successfully principal preparation programs.

The research conducted in the current study centers on recent graduates' perceptions of their principal preparation programming to determine if it was effective in preparing them to become successful administrators in 21st-century schools. While the study centers on a single program, the researcher has chosen to conduct a holistic analysis of the data, not only to generalize on the effectiveness of the program but to gain a deeper understanding of how the program affects students and the reasons behind the program's effectiveness. To identify and understand causal connections between the regional university's principal preparation programming and experiences of graduates completing the program, the researcher employed a cross-case analysis strategy for data collection. Purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of four administrators who recently graduated from the regional university's principal preparation program, representing leadership in today's P-12 school settings.

Case Study

The principal preparation programming at a regional university is the focus of this study. More direct, the specific focus is determining if the regional university's principal preparation programming delivers the skills and experiences necessary for graduates to have success in today's challenging school environment through the lens of multiple novice administrators, making this study a multiple-case study. "We are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case" (Stake, 1995, p. 3). In this study, the

particular case we are interested in is the principal preparation programming at one regional university.

The regional university in this study is situated in the southwest portion of the state of Kentucky. The university's demographics consist of approximately 59% women and 41% men. The population consists of approximately 17,000 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students. The principal preparation program is a hybrid learning environment that blends face-to-face classes with online learning. Entry into the program requires candidates to have at least three years of experience in teaching, a Master's degree, and a minimum of 3.0-grade point average in Master's-level content.

Many administrators struggle with leading a school as they circumnavigate the challenges and constraints existing in modern education. While the NELP Building Level Standards gives detail and guidance to the demands of school leadership, it also illustrates the enormous responsibility associated with being a leader in today's schools. Colleges and universities have developed principal preparation programs with different leadership components and experiences to assist students in preparing for the expanded roles and responsibilities associated with educational leadership. The necessity of having qualified graduates exiting preparation programs is due to an increase in accountability and the diverse nature of the issues plaguing students' ability to attain academic success. Effective principal preparation programs can positively affect not only the graduates, but the staff, students, parents, and community of the school they are leading through the transfer and implementation of effective leadership skills and philosophy.

Geographical distance from the regional university, current position, and diversity of student population served were categories utilized to select interview candidates with

each participant viewed as a unique and individual case. A representative sample from recent graduates gives us the balance and variety necessary and vital when selecting cases to study (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 1995). INSPIRE-G Survey Item Matrix, along with the NELP Building Standards, were analyzed to further develop initial interview protocols relevant to the research study before drawing any generalizations from the data. Each interview was examined and viewed as a separate case to thoroughly understand his or her perceptions of the university's principal preparation program; how they felt about program delivery; what experiences they participated in while enrolled in their program; and degree of influence the program had on their ability to lead their school effectively. Upon conducting a review of the data, *progressive focusing* was the standard utilized when examining the meanings obtained from surveys and interviews. "If early questions are not working, if new issues become apparent, the design is changed" (Stake, 1995, p. 9). Through the progressive focusing activities, individual data obtained are combined and analyzed collectively as a multiple case study, allowing for cross-case analysis. "Case study researchers use the method of specimens as their primary method to come to know extensively and intensively about the single case" (Stake, p. 36).

Boundaries or Criteria

The key to a successful qualitative case study is its ability to be described within certain parameters, such as a certain program measured within a specific time frame, or bounded (Creswell, 2013; Hemmer et al., 2013; Stake, 1995). For this study, the research questions relate to novice administrators' perceptions of how a regional university's principal preparation program equipped them for the rigors associated with leading a 21st century school.

The researcher established the criterion of recent graduates as one to two years removed from the principal preparation programming and one to two years in a leadership position. The selection of participants occurred by e-mailing recent graduates from the regional university's principal preparation program. The e-mail inquired if the recent graduate would be willing to participate in an interview before receiving the INSPIRE-G Survey regarding their perceptions of how their principal preparation program equipped them to be an administrator. Criteria were included in the e-mail to identify the grade level of their school, student population, years as an administrator, and school location. Each willing participant was asked to answer a short list of questions and to send back an acknowledgment of their acceptance to participate in a follow-up interview. Upon receipt of the list of recent graduates willing to participate in a follow-up interview, responses were reviewed to ensure a representative sample was selected from elementary, middle, and high school grade levels.

Review of the TELL Kentucky survey data and initial interview questions determined if there was a need for additional interviews. The interviews will give a deeper understanding of the various components of the regional university's principal preparation program. The expansion of interview questions followed the progressive focus of the research to validate better any conclusions derived from the analysis of the data. Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Kentucky survey data collected from each of the participant's schools were reviewed along with the interviews to triangulate the information to the NELP Building Standards and match the information to the research questions.

Participants

Qualitative research relies heavily upon the careful consideration of selected participants to ensure they can contribute useful information regarding the specific focus of the study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Rossman, 2011). Individuals who are selected to participate in a qualitative study should not be randomly selected but selected with a focus on adding value and knowledge to the study (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful sampling was used in this study to select participants meeting the criteria of adding value based on their recent graduation from WKU and current leadership role in a P-12 school. When selecting a sample size to include in a study, consideration should be given to the level and breadth of the study the researcher is looking to achieve. Maxwell lists five possible goals for purposeful selection:

1. Achieve the representativeness of the individuals selected
2. Adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population
3. Deliberately select individuals that are critical for testing theories of the study
4. Establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons or differences between individuals
5. Select participants that will best enable you to answer your research questions

In the current study, a sample size ($n = 4$) was selected to produce in-depth information that is rich in detail. The participants were selected based on their graduation status and their current employment status.

Additionally, the type of leadership position and grade level of their assigned school were reviewed to ensure equitable representation from K-12 schools. Through the review of participants for inclusion in the study, every attempt was made to ensure that

each participant held an administrative role at their school. Interviews were digitally recorded with the participant's permission. Confidentiality of responses was discussed, in detail, with each participant before the interview. Participants are only identified by job classification or role, not by legal name. The use of interviews, TELL Kentucky surveys, and literature review allowed for triangulation, enhancing internal validity, and confirming emergent findings (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

As a doctoral candidate currently enrolled in a regional university's Educational Leadership Doctoral (EDLD) program, as well as actively serving as an administrator, the researcher share key characteristics with the participants of the study. Interpretive reports were generated based on the analysis of evidence and coded into a qualitative data analysis computer software (NVIVO). Stake (1995) stated that "Each researcher consciously or unconsciously makes continuous decisions about how much emphasis to give each role" (p. 91). According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative researchers should do the following:

- View social phenomena holistically
- Systematically reflect on who they are in the inquiry
- Be sensitive to their biography and how it shapes the study
- Use complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative

This role of the researcher is further supported by Creswell (2013):

Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes

patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

Researcher Biases

As the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative inquiry, researchers need to establish trustworthiness by acknowledging their biases to allow the reader the frame to which to view the conclusions of the study (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Rossman, 2011). In addition to establish trustworthiness, the recognition of personal interest in the study can provide the researcher with valuable insight and data about the phenomena (Maxwell, 2013).

The researcher served as the primary instrument to collect and analyze data through the development of the literature review, review of the surveys, and interaction with selected participants during interviews. The researcher is currently a sitting school administrator and as such might feel a need to skew the data to highlight the pressures and expectations administrators face with limited resources to fully support the mandates stemming from political agendas. Also, the researcher is currently enrolled in a doctoral program at a regional university, possibly leading him to disregard any information that may paint any regional university in a negative light. The researcher selected the methodology and framework, data collection, data analyzation, and stated the conclusion with these two biases in mind to prevent the skewing of the overall findings of this research study.

Data Sources

When selecting the data necessary to evaluate the principal preparation program effectiveness, a regional university was chosen based on the researcher's inherent interest in the programming at the university due to actively being enrolled in a similar leadership program. Multiple forms of data were collected from participants to gain an understanding of the perceptions of those who recently graduated from the university's principal preparation program. The following sources of data were analyzed for this case study and coded into NVIVO. Table 5 illustrates how each instrument relates to each other and the study's research questions.

Table 5

Research Questions tied to Interview Questions vs. TELL Kentucky vs. NELP Building Standards

Research Questions	Interview Questions	TELL Kentucky	NELP Building Standards
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 8	School leadership	Vision, mission, and core values
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 9	School leadership Teacher leadership	Ethics and professional norms
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 10	School leadership Teacher leadership	Equity and cultural leadership
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 11	Instructional practices & support New teacher support	Instructional leadership
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 12	Community Support & Involvement	Community and external leadership
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 13	Facility & resources Managing student conduct Time	Operations management
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 14	Professional learning	Building professional capacity
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 15		The Internship

Note. Interview Questions are listed in Appendix A.

INSPIRE-G Survey Item Matrix

The survey item matrix used by the Wallace Foundation's UPPI project, Graduate Survey (INSPIRE-G), has been tested and utilized throughout the country by institutes of higher education to learn more about their leadership preparation program features and strategies to improve the quality of instruction and experiences. The survey utilizes exploratory factor analysis to examine the underlying factor structures and to establish construct validity. The survey's reliability stems from variable scales that include items with strong factor analysis and internal consistency generated from the over 300 responses from graduates of 10 national programs. (University Council for Educational Administration, 2018). The survey gathers information from participants on their preparation experiences, learning outcomes, and career intentions utilizing three broad reporting components including program quality and experiences, learning outcomes, and participant's beliefs about the principalship (University Council for Educational Administration, 2018).

TELL Kentucky

TELL Kentucky survey is administered to all school staff on a biennial basis and utilized by the Kentucky Department of Education to compile leadership information on

- Community Engagement and Support
- Teacher Leadership
- School Leadership
- Managing Student Conduct
- Use of Time
- Professional Development

- Facilities and Resources
- Instructional Practices and Support
- New Teacher Support (New Teacher Center, 2018)

The trustworthiness of the information gained from the TELL Kentucky survey stems from each participant's ability to answer each question anonymously to protect against potential retaliation from administration as well as the 91% response rate of all teachers across the Commonwealth. All the information gained through the TELL survey had unique staff identifiers redacted to ensure the confidentiality of the staff providing information.

Interviews

The interviews allowed descriptive information about recent graduates' perceptions of how their university's principal preparation program equipped them for leadership readiness when compared to the newly drafted NELP standards for building leadership. Additional interviews were arranged and scheduled as needed after analyzing and coding the transcripts from the initial interviews. The interviews were designed to inquire about the leadership expectations outlined by NELP:

1. Mission, Vision, and Improvement
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Learning and Instruction
5. Community and External Leadership
6. Operations and Management
7. Building Professional Capacity

8. Internship (Young, 2017)

Data Collection

Permission was acquired from the Institute Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects, Western Kentucky University, before conducting any research associated with this study. The researcher examined a regional University's principal preparation program through the perceptions, experiences, and staff evaluations of four administrators. The researcher collected information on the regional university's principal preparation program through recent graduate surveys, staff surveys, and interviews. The researcher then collected and initially organized the data using the following categories related to program quality and preparation for leadership practices:

1. Rigor and Relevance
2. Faculty Quality
3. Peer Relationships
4. Program Accessibility
5. Internship/Residency Design and Quality
6. Ethical and Professional Norms
7. Strategic Leadership
8. Operations and Management
9. Instructional Leadership
10. Professional and Organizational Culture
11. Supportive and Equitable Learning Environment
12. Family and Community Relations

Participant selection. The researcher obtained a list of recent graduates from the regional university's principal preparation cohort data. An e-mail was drafted and sent to all recent graduates from the regional university's principal preparation program. The e-mail provided a brief overview of the researcher's study and inquired if they would be willing to participate in a research study about their experiences with their principal preparation programming. The participants were asked to complete a short series of questions about their current school assignment, years removed from their principal preparation program, school location, and student demographics. Interested participants e-mailed back their responses to the questions and their consent confirming their interest in participating in a series of interviews regarding how their university's principal preparation programming prepared them for the responsibilities associated with being a school administrator. Once responses were received, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling to select four participants from the region's P-12 schools. The sample contained participants from various levels of P-12 education, ensuring a diverse sample of P-12 institutions representing the geographic region of the regional university.

TELL Kentucky. Once the participants were selected, the TELL Kentucky survey data from their perspective schools were reviewed through the New Teacher Center website that houses the TELL Kentucky Surveys. The researcher utilized the TELL Kentucky survey results to validate the participants' school success and teachers' perceptions of the administrator's leadership abilities, teacher quality, school leadership, professional development, instructional practice, and new teacher support. The results were viewed independently and then combined with the other administrators' surveys to identify patterns.

Interviews. Individuals considered for the study were initially contacted via e-mail to inquire about their willingness to participate in this study. Following initial contact of recent graduates from the regional university's principal leadership program, those expressing interest in participating in the study and subsequently selected for inclusion into the study were sent a cover letter and the interview questions via e-mail outlining the study and confidentiality safeguards. Interviews were scheduled within two weeks of participant receipt of the interview questions and offered to be conducted at the participant's workplace. Each interviewee was allowed to select the setting of the interview to decrease tension and anxiety and offer reassurance that this is not a summative evaluation of their ability to lead a school. The researcher wanted his role in the interviews to be viewed more as an active participant, someone who has participated in some aspects of the leadership development programming at a regional university as well as currently serving as a school administrator in the region. The researcher strived to create and maintain the position of simply another administrator talking about programming and experiences that are employed to lead students and staff. This approach was taken following the interview protocol established by Brinkmann (2014), "In a qualitative research interview, however, knowledge is produced socially in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee" (p. 71). The interviews were conducted following the hermeneutic and pragmatist philosophies that recognized knowledge and understanding as an ongoing activity that occurs in life. That mindset allowed the interviews to be conducted more fluidly, enabling the interviewer to respond and direct additional questions based not only on the answers provided by each interviewee but also on how they answered the questions.

Each interviewee was given a copy of the initial set of questions at least 24 hours before the interview was scheduled to take place. Informed consent was obtained before each interview, at which time each interviewee received another detailed explanation of the nature of the study and was offered to withdraw from the study if desired. Confidentiality was once again explained as well as their right to stop the questioning at any time and withdraw any answers given in response to the initial set of questions or any additional questions asked through the interview process. Upon completion of the interviews, each participant was informed that additional interviews might be needed as the data were collected, reviewed, coded, and analyzed to create a more in-depth understanding of their university's principal preparation programming. Each participant signed an acknowledgment of the possibility of an additional interview or follow-up questions, agreeing to participate if clarification or more detail was needed to complete the research. As a sign of gratitude, each participant was entered into a drawing for a \$100 Amazon gift card. TELL Kentucky surveys were reviewed again following the interviews to triangulate the data to the research questions and validate the assertions made by the administrators. Pseudonyms were utilized for the schools of selected administrators as well as participants interviewed to protect their confidentiality. Data safeguards were in place and adhered to during the study to protect the identity of the participants, along with their answers to the interview questions. All data associated with the research was housed in a secure location at an off-site residence along with a copy of all materials secured with the researcher's dissertation chair via an encoded flash drive.

Data Analysis

The case study's strength is enhanced by the researcher's ability to include multiple forms of evidence to address the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). The parameters for this case study fit that of a multi-case study and as such Creswell (2013) outlined two kinds of data analysis: (1) within-case analysis which looks at each participant as an individual case, and (2) cross-case analysis which looks at all participants selected to generate findings. In addition to the application of Creswell's data analysis methods, inductive data analysis was utilized to process the various sources of data. Inductive data analysis requires the researcher to unitize and categorize the data. Unitizing is the process of coding information obtained through surveys, interviews, or other sources of data that transforms the coded information into separate units with related meanings. Categorizing involves taking the data that has been initially coded into separate units and identifying patterns among the data that could be used to create categories (Creswell, 2013). To consistently apply coding schemes to data and monitor any inconsistencies, the following inductive data analysis steps were followed as summarized by Creswell (2013):

Step 1 – Create open codes in NVIVO, noting any relationships that
emerge

Step 2 – Review relationships that emerge and build common categories
recognizing patterns or themes across data

Step 3 – Interpret the results and make comparisons

Step 4 – Explain the results

Coding. Creswell (2013) stated that the coding of data involves generating categories or themes to analyze. Open-coding was conducted in the study and is a form of data analysis in which data are examined, and meanings are assigned to an individual word, phrase, or sentence. The researcher collected and organized the data obtained through surveys and interviews into the following program quality and leadership standards, as stated previously:

1. Rigor and Relevance
2. Faculty Quality
3. Peer Relationships
4. Program Accessibility
5. Internship/Residency Design and Quality
6. Ethical and Professional Norms
7. Strategic Leadership
8. Operations and Management
9. Instructional Leadership
10. Professional and Organizational Culture
11. Supportive and Equitable Learning Environment
12. Family and Community Relations

Once the data were initially coded into the 12 categories, the researcher searched for patterns to give meaning to the data uncovered in the study. The researcher employed a technique to assess consistency in how the interview responses were coded and analyzed, called *inter-rater reliability*. A professional currently serving as an educational consultant with the local regional cooperative was selected to code and analyze the data to increase

the reliability of the researcher's coding. Prior to the educational consultant working with the data, a brief review of coding was conducted. The same section of an interview was coded by both the primary researcher and the educational consultant to calculate the *percentage of agreement*. The number of times the primary researcher and the educational consultant agreed on the coding of a data item was 18 of the 20 items coded establishing a 90% interrater reliability. Copies of the interview schedule and the initial coding categories were given to the educational consultant along with each participant's interview responses. This coding scheme was initially conducted within a single case, single administrator response, then across multiple cases, every administrators' response.

An outside agency was employed to transcribe the recordings. Once the transcriptions of the interviews were received, they were imported into NVIVO for coding. Once the nodes were established for the case, the transcribed interviews were coded based on their relationship to the various nodes. Patterns were then examined within each case, or administrator participant, to determine the effects of the principal preparation programming on the leadership abilities of the participating administrators. Additional interviews were scheduled if more detail or clarification was needed after the initial data was analyzed. Any data obtained from subsequent interviews or questions were imported into NVIVO for coding and inclusion in the analysis. Data from TELL Kentucky surveys were also imported into NVIVO and coded. The coding of the interviews for each participant and the survey results were then merged to identify and triangulate patterns to enhance the validity of the findings. Finally, a cross-case analysis was performed when the coding data from participants at various school levels were combined to conduct a thematic analysis across the cases. The combination of data was

performed similarly, as Creswell (2013) and Stake (1995) explained when discussing the assertions or interpretations of the meanings of multiple cases.

Categorizing. The grouping of coding concepts into categories is the second process of data analysis. Sorting data into relevant characteristics helps the researcher identify common themes and analysis data for interconnections within each participant's responses as well as across all participants' responses (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Each piece of coded datum was sorted into nodes to identify commonalities among important pieces of information. Patterns and commonalities were then able to be identified and categorized. Nodes were merged to create new categories of data that shared relationships using open coding.

Making Comparisons. Case study data should be examined to determine and identify relationships, find commonalities, and generate themes among the nodes of data from all sources of information collected (Creswell, 2013). In this case study, four novice administrators' perceptions were examined to identify, through TELL Kentucky surveys and interviews, similar codes and categories to determine central themes across all cases as well as identify any outliers that may affect the representation of the data holistically. Data analysis should be conducted multiple times to re-check and verify comparisons, allowing for any adjustment or rearrangement of the data to ensure proper reflection of data in appropriate categories (Maxwell, 2013).

Multiple case studies allow research to move beyond the confines of a single case study, allowing for the generalizations created through the study to carry more validity over-generalizations created utilizing only one case (Stake, 1995). The researcher used inductive analysis when reviewing the data contained in the surveys and obtained through

the interviews. Patton (2002) stated that inductive analysis allows categories to emerge from the patterns of the data reviewed by the researcher. In this study, the triangulation of the TELL Kentucky survey and interviews allowed the researcher to present a thick, rich, detailed description of each novice administrator's perception of his or her principal preparation program and his or her ability to effectively lead a school based on learning and experiences obtained through the program.

Data Representation

According to Stake (1995), there are several ways to communicate a case study's results. It is the researcher's challenge to identify the sources of information that pertain to their research questions and make sense of the patterns that emerge from the data. It is the researcher's responsibility to communicate the data obtained through the study in such a way that they enhance the body of knowledge that already exists for that topic in a manner that is easily understood by the reader (Creswell, 2013). This researcher has followed established protocols when working with the data to accurately display the information in a manner that is easily understood by the reader and advances current understanding of principalship programming.

Credibility

The researcher maintained credibility for this research through six critical ways:

1. The survey instrument used, TELL Kentucky, is a research-validated instrument administered by an outside agency. The outside agency compiled the results of the surveys to create the summary findings report.

2. The *seven stages of an interview inquiry*, as detailed by Brinkmann (2014), were adhered to during the interview process. Interviews were conducted utilizing a semi-structured interview process. The researcher formulated the purpose of the investigation and designed the study. The researcher then interviewed the participants utilizing a *reflective* approach. The researcher utilized an outside entity to transcribe the interviews. Once the transcription was completed, the researcher coded and analyzed the interview material. The researcher verified the data through fact-checking against the TELL Kentucky surveys. Lastly, the researcher reported the findings through the current research study.
3. Member checks verified the accuracy of the transcription and served to validate the authenticity information gathered during the interviews.
4. NVIVO (version 11.4.3), qualitative data analysis computer software, provided the platform necessary to analyze the data gained from the surveys and interviews, allowing for a deeper understanding of the program and possible pattern recognition.
5. Inter-rater reliability was utilized to ensure consistency with coding interview responses.
6. All biases about the researcher had been previously exposed and visited throughout the study to guard against the possibility of the biases skewing the overall finding of the study.

Also, before conducting interviews, an interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed. The interview questions were specifically developed by program experts. A focus group

from a panel of experts from a Regional Education Cooperative was established to determine the content validity of the interview questions before conducting the actual interview with selected administrators. Patton (2002) stated that focus groups consisted of a panel of experts that were well-informed about the nature of the study and able to represent diverse positions related to the study. Focus groups also serve to assist with triangulation and validity checking (Creswell, 2013). Each member of the focus group received a packet containing a cover letter, the problem statement of the study, the purpose of the study, and the research questions along with the interview questions for review (Appendix B). Members of the focus group offered feedback concerning the effectiveness of the questions through their answers and comments on each question contained in the initial set of formulated interview questions.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the effectiveness of a regional university's principal preparation program through the lens of recent graduates serving as novice administrators. The study was conducted to determine if the programming and experiences gained in a regional university's principal preparation program equipped recent graduates with the skills outlined in the National Educational Leadership Preparation program building level standards needed to function as a school administrator effectively. This study can be classified as a multi-case study, as four different graduates were individually examined that spanned different levels of P-12 education. At the beginning of this chapter, the guiding research questions were restated along with two subsidiary questions related to the effectiveness of a regional university's principal preparation programming. The restatement of the questions was followed by an

overview of the design and methods utilized in this study. Data from TELL Kentucky and interviews were collected and analyzed through NVIVO, qualitative data analysis computer software, allowing this research to be both descriptive and evaluative.

Chapter IV describes the data of each administrator's perception of the regional university's principal preparation program collected through interviews and TELL Kentucky survey results. Chapter V discusses administrators' perceptions of how prepared they were for educational leadership after completing their principal preparation program, individually and as a whole, by the guiding research questions of the study. The research study concludes with a summary of findings, recommendations for practice and future research, and limitations of the study as it applies to the field of principal preparation and leadership training.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate and describe the effectiveness of a regional university's principal preparation programming through the lens of novice administrators. The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Standards were utilized as the benchmark to determine the effectiveness of the participants' leadership abilities. The participant responses and experiences, combined with the Kentucky Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) survey results were analyzed to provide an understanding of whether the experiences and training gained through a regional university's principal preparation program adequately prepared administrators for the rigors of school leadership.

A study of this nature is warranted in order to compare the perceptions of recent graduates to the body of research about the strengths and weaknesses of principal preparation programming across the country in light of the newly designed NELP Building Standards. An overall summary of novice administrators' perceptions is explored and analyzed in this chapter in line with the research questions for this study. The qualitative research methodology for this study focused on four novice administrators working in leadership roles who recently graduated from a regional university and entailed conducting semi-structured interviews that weighed their views of their leadership readiness against the eight NELP Building Standards. Their responses were analyzed and compared against their school's TELL survey results of school leadership and success to answer the research questions.

Focus Group

A panel of five experts was selected to establish a focus group to assess the research questions of this study and develop interview questions. “The aim of the focus group is not to reach consensus about, or solutions to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different viewpoints on an issue” (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 175). The viewpoints from the focus group allowed for triangulation of the research methods and validity checking of the interview questions measured against the research questions.

The five-panel team comprising the focus group included an educational consultant from the regional educational cooperative, two project directors, the Associate Executive Director of the regional educational cooperative, and a current Elementary Principal. Each member of the focus group was sent a packet containing an implied consent letter to participate in the focus group, the purpose of the study, reasons why they were selected to participate in the study, and the tentative questions being considered to interview novice administrators.

The focus group members submitted questions on why particular questions were being asked and gave suggestions as to how the questions could be reworked to render data aligned to the research questions. Through the feedback received from the focus group members, the interview questions were refined and clarified to ensure the interviewees gave answers yielding data relevant to the study. The feedback ranged from clarification to caution. One focus group member stated that the way a question was worded could be interpreted as addressing both management and instructional practices. Members offered additional questions that could support the focus of the study. Another focus group member suggested that I ask about the *mentor* assignments of their principal

preparation program, which resulted in the redesign of Question 15 to ask about the intern support. One of the final recommendations was that the questions align more with the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Standards since they are serving as the foundation to assess the administrators' readiness for instructional leadership. Questions 8 through 14 were amended to gain more concise information on the leadership attributes addressed through the NELP Building Standards. One focus group member took the opportunity to pilot the interview questions by answering each one of the questions based on her experience and offering feedback as to how her answers would either support or detract from the focus of the research.

All members of the focus group agreed that in totality, the questions correlated well with the focus of the study. They also agreed that the interview protocols were structured in such a way to elicit data in support of the research questions. The input of the focus group members allowed the researcher to amend the interview questions and validate the interview protocols are aligned with the research questions and focus of the study.

Research Questions

The primary research question, along with the subsidiary questions, framed this research.

Primary Research Question.

In what ways are graduates from a regional university's principal preparation program equipped with the leadership skills and experiences necessary to successfully function as an instructional leader in today's challenging school environment?

Subsidiary Research Question 1.

Does the university's content and program design support acquisition of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Leadership Standards identified in the literature: (1) mission, vision, and improvement; (2) ethics and professional norms; (3) equity, inclusiveness and cultural responsiveness; (4) learning and instruction; (5) community and external leadership; (6) operations and management; (7) building professional capacity; and (8) internship for novice administrators?

Subsidiary Research Question 2.

How do recent graduates who attended a regional university perceive the relative strengths and weaknesses of their principal preparation program?

Sample Description

The study utilized qualitative methodology to analyze data collected via interviews, review of survey results from TELL Kentucky, review of results from state testing, and information about each participants' school obtained through Kentucky Department of Education release of School Report Card data found at [//applications.education.ky.gov/src/](http://applications.education.ky.gov/src/) to report demographic and performance data for public review. This methodology provided the researcher with multiple forms of evidence to address the research questions with rich contextual data. The initial invitation to participate in the study was sent out to 15 recent graduates from a regional university. The response rate of the first invitation was only 6%. A second e-mail was sent one week later with another four students completing the brief survey increasing the response rate to 33%. A final e-mail was sent to recent graduates who had yet to complete the survey

yielding another four respondents bringing the response rate to 60%. Upon review of the nine graduates who consented to be included in the study, four of the respondents indicated in the survey that they were currently in administrative positions. All four of the qualified respondents were given a copy of the interview questions, along with an *Informed Consent* document. Signed *Informed Consent* documents were received from three of the respondents, with one respondent requesting to submit their answers to the questions electronically due to scheduling difficulties. The final response rate of qualified participants interviewed was 60%. The factor that may have contributed to fewer participants was the amount of work all teachers have placed upon them as well as many of the recent graduates have yet to be employed in a leadership position. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from each participant through Informed Consent forms (see Appendix C) and approved through Western Kentucky University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix D).

Four interviews were scheduled at a time convenient for each of the participants. Three of the four participants preferred to have the interviews conducted over the phone instead of in-person due to timing issues. One of the four participants stated that an interview was not possible due to emergency family matters but would submit responses to the interviews in writing.

The four interviews were coded into NVIVO utilizing the NELP Building Standards as initial nodes or categories by the researcher. Inter-rater reliability was utilized to ensure that the initial coding of the interview responses by the researcher was appropriately matched to the initial categories. After the initial coding by both the researcher and the independent analyst, the interviews were analyzed for a second time

by both the researcher in an open coding format to identify any additional categories that emerged from the review of the data. The new categories were compared, and an agreement was reached between the researcher and independent rater on data placed into the new categories. A final review of the interviews was conducted independently to look for additional information about the antecedent participant characteristics of prior leadership, professional experience, and levels of district support. Additionally, ancillary comments made by the participants during the interview were analyzed and coded.

The TELL Kentucky survey data were analyzed and coded to the established nodes or categories to triangulate the relationship between participant's interview responses and survey data collected for their school. To keep the identities of the interviewees confidential, each participant and their respective school was assigned a *pseudo name* with the key kept in a secure location.

Mediating factors relating to the participant and their respective schools were obtained through an analysis of the Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card data. These factors were used to give context and understanding to the challenges that the new administrators faced when trying to lead their school. It also provided information as to the level of experience the administrators brought to their respective schools.

Descriptive Findings

The study population included 15 recent graduates of a regional university's principal leadership program. An initial survey was sent to each of the participants to gather information regarding what year they graduated the program, if they were currently serving in an administrative role, the name of their school, grade levels found

within their school, their current role, and how many years they have served as an administrator at their current school. Table 6 lists the responses from each of the 15 recent graduates contacted. Two additional e-mail requests were sent following the original request, each one about a week apart from the last contact. After the third contact, four administrators were selected to participate in the study.

Table 6

Participation Responses from Participation Survey

Graduate	Graduation Year	Permission	Completed Survey	School	Admin Role	Years as Admin	Consent for Interview
A	2018	Yes	Yes	Elementary	Y	2	Yes
B	2018	Yes	Yes	Elementary	Y	3	N/A
C	2018	Yes	Yes	Middle	Y	6	Yes
D	2018	Yes	Yes	Middle	Y	1	Yes
E	2018	Yes	Yes	Middle	Y	1	Yes
F	2018	Yes	Yes	Middle	N	0	N/A
G	2018	Yes	Yes	High	N	0	N/A
H	2017	Yes	Yes	Elementary	N	0	N/A
I	2018	Yes	Yes	Middle	N	0	N/A
J	2018	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
K	2018	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
L	2018	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
M	2018	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N	2018	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
O	2018	Yes	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: Participant e-mail information obtained by consent from regional universities database of recent graduates. E-Mail information on recent graduate and cohort information can also be retrieved via the regional university's public website.

The selected participants consisted of two male (Jeremy and Billy) and two female (Sally and Kathy) administrators, with Sally, Jeremy, and Billy serving as assistant principals and Kathy serving as a counselor. Sally was employed at an elementary school while Kathy, Jeremy, and Billy were employed at a middle school. The schools of each participant are as follows:

- Sally – Albright Elementary School

- Kathy – Barlow Middle School
- Jeremy – Crestview Middle School
- Billy – Devlin Middle School

Each participant was asked to indicate how long he or she had been serving in administrative roles. Sally has been serving as an assistant principal for 2 years, with 8 years in education. Kathy has been serving as a school counselor for the last 6 years, with 25 years in education. Jeremy and Billy are both in their first year as an assistant principal with 13 and 19 years in education, respectively. The average amount of time the participants have been in education is 16 years, with the shortest tenure in education being 8 years and the longest tenure recorded at 25 years (see Table 7).

Table 7

Demographic Information for Participating Administrators

Administrator	Shelly	Kathy	Jeremy	Billy
Years as an Educator	8	20	13	19
Years in Administrative Role	2	6	1	1
Years in Current District	8	19	4	10
Years Since Program Completion	2	1	1	1

Note. Adapted from Kentucky Department of Education School Report Cards 2017-2018 and Education Professional Standards Board (EPSP).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes each participant faced when leading their school, demographic and student achievement data was pulled from the Kentucky Department of Education’s School Report Card data. The school data on students and staff for each school are detailed (see Table 8).

Table 8

Demographic Information for Participating Schools

School	Albright ES	Barlow MS	Crestview MS	Devlin MS
Student Enrollment	509	434	746	1,036
Type of School (ES, MS, HS)	ES	MS	MS	MS
Percent Economically Disadvantaged	40%	80%	59%	71%
Number of Teachers	32	29	42	51
Student/Teacher Ratio	17:1	15:1	19:1	21:1
Percent Teacher Turnover	9%	6%	25%	9%
Percent 1 st Year Teachers	3%	18%	25%	2%

Note. Adapted from Kentucky Department of Education School Report Cards 2017-2018 and Education Professional Standards Board (EPSP).

Sally's school, Albright Elementary School, had a student enrollment of 500 students for the 2017/18 school year. The percentage of disadvantaged students was 40%. The student to teacher ratio is 17:1. The percentage of teacher turnover registers at 9%, with 3% of the staff beginning their teaching career at Albright Elementary School (see Table 9). Regarding student achievement, the percentage of students who scored *proficient* or *distinguished* on the state assessment for reading and math was 63% and 59%, respectively. The data for Sally's school indicates that while they have challenges with disadvantaged students, the majority of the students are learning at a rate above the state averages of 55% for reading and 49% for elementary students across the commonwealth (see Table 9).

Table 9

Percent Proficient or Distinguished for Participating Schools

School	Albright ES	Barlow MS	Crestview MS	Devlin MS
Number of Students Assessed	297	401	736	1,009
Reading	63%	19%	59%	71%
Mathematics	59%	13%	46%	65%

Note. Adapted from Kentucky Department of Education School Report Cards 2017-2018.

Kathy's school, Barlow Middle School, had a student enrollment of 400 students for the 2017/18 school year. The percentage of disadvantaged students was 80%, the highest of all the schools included in the study. The student to teacher ratio is 15:1, the lowest of all the schools included in the study. The percentage of teacher turnover registers at 7%, with 18% of the staff beginning their teaching career at Barlow Middle School. Regarding student achievement, the percentage of students who scored *proficient* or *distinguished* on state assessments for reading and math were 19% and 13%, respectively. Katy's school was the lowest-performing school included in the study.

Jeremy's school, Crestview Middle School, had a student enrollment of 750 students for the 2017/18 school year. The percentage of disadvantaged students was 59%. The student to teacher ratio is 19:1. The percentage of teacher turnover registers at 26%, with 25% of the staff beginning their teaching career at Crestview Middle School, the highest for both categories of the schools included in the study. Regarding student achievement, the percentage of students who scored *proficient* or *distinguished* on the state assessment for reading and math were 59% and 46%, respectively. While Crestview Middle School posted results similar to the state's average for reading and mathematics, the high teacher turnover, along with the number of new teachers indicates that there could be an issue with providing adequate support to teachers.

Billy's school, Devlin Middle School, had a student enrollment of 1000 students for the 2017/18 school year, the highest of all the schools included in the study. The percentage of disadvantaged students was 71%. The student to teacher ratio is 21:1, the highest of all of the schools included in the study. The percentage of teacher turnover registers at 9%, with only 2% of the staff beginning their teaching career at Devlin

Middle School, the lowest beginning teaching staff included in the study. Regarding student achievement, the percentage of students who scored *proficient* or *distinguished* on the state assessment for reading and math was 71% and 65%, respectively, the highest in both categories of all the schools included in the study. While Devlin Middle School posted the highest percentage of disadvantaged students in the study, coupled with the highest student to teacher ratios, the school achieve the highest percentage of *proficient* and *distinguished* scores on the state assessment. These scores were well above state averages for middle school students.

The average student enrollment for all the schools included in the study was 681 students, with the average economically disadvantaged number of students calculated at 63%. The student to teacher ratios for all the schools averaged 18:1. The average teacher turnover registered at 12%, with 12% of the teachers beginning their teaching careers at the schools included in the study, coming in lower than the state average of 17.0%. The assessment results for Albright Elementary School, the only elementary school in the study, are well above the state average for both reading and mathematics. However, when we take the average of the middle schools included in the study, they are below the state averages for both reading and mathematics.

The TELL Kentucky Survey asks staff employed at each of the participating school's questions about the following categories that pertain to School Leadership, Teacher Leadership, Instructional Practices and Support, New Teacher Support, Community Engagement and Support, Facility and Resources, Managing Student Conduct, Time, and Professional Learning. The information collected from the TELL

Kentucky Survey aids in answering the first two research questions related to the leadership skills necessary to successfully perform as an educational leader.

Albright Elementary School's staff rated their leadership the highest in all categories except for new teacher support (see Figure 4). A total of 99% of the school staff viewed their leadership team as supportive as teachers on the TELL KY survey for the 2017/18 school year. Teachers also felt supported and encouraged to take on teacher leadership roles by rating their leadership 97% in this category. A total of 100% of the teachers felt they had strong instructional practices support. The lowest rating came for new teachers feeling they had the support they needed, with only 86% of the staff feeling new teachers were supported during their first year at their school. A total of 100% of the teachers felt they had good community support, conflict management, and professional learning opportunities. A total of 100% of the staff felt that they had adequate facilities and resources to teach, and 95% of the staff felt they were given adequate time to prepare and instruct the students at Albright Elementary School.

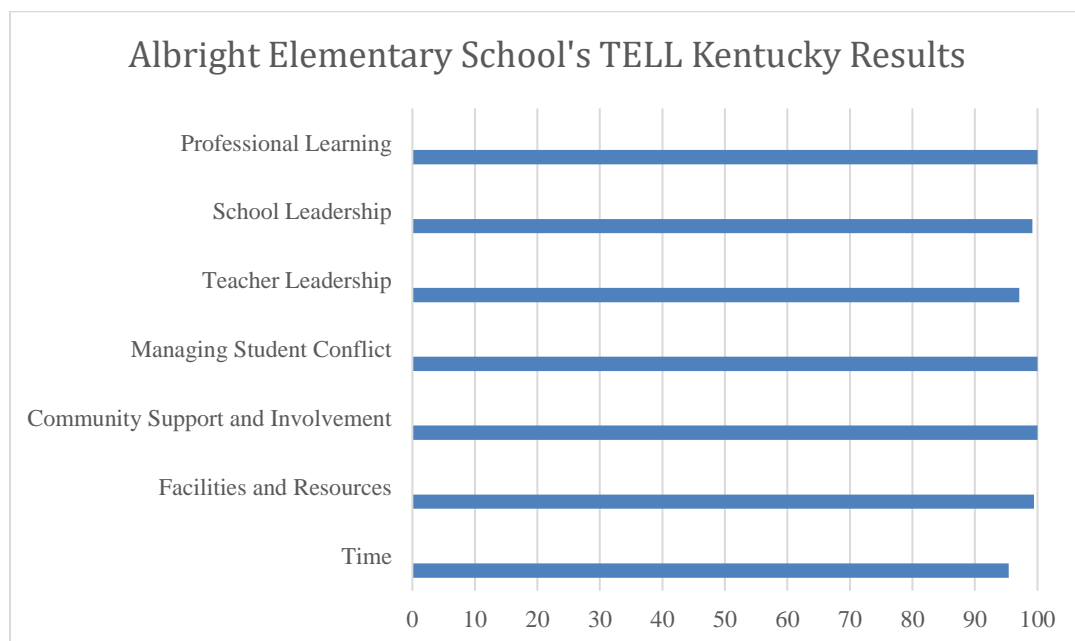


Figure 4. Albright Elementary School's 2017 / 18 TELL KY Results by percentage.

Barlow Middle School had more mixed results than the other schools included in the survey (see Figure 5). A total of 90% of the teachers felt they had strong leadership, the lowest of all the schools included in the study. A total of 93% of the teachers felt they were encouraged and supported to take on leadership roles. A total of 91% of the teachers felt they had strong instructional practices support in the classroom. A total of 89% of the teachers felt their school provided adequate support to new teachers. Community support and involvement at Barlow Middle School was rated the lowest of all school included in the study at 57%. A total of 84% of the staff felt they had adequate facilities and resources to teach, the lowest of all the schools included in the study. The teachers felt that the school administration adequately managed student conflict with a rating of 89%. A total of 83% of the staff felt they had enough time to prepare and teach their students, with 90% of the staff feeling they were given enough professional learning opportunities throughout the year.

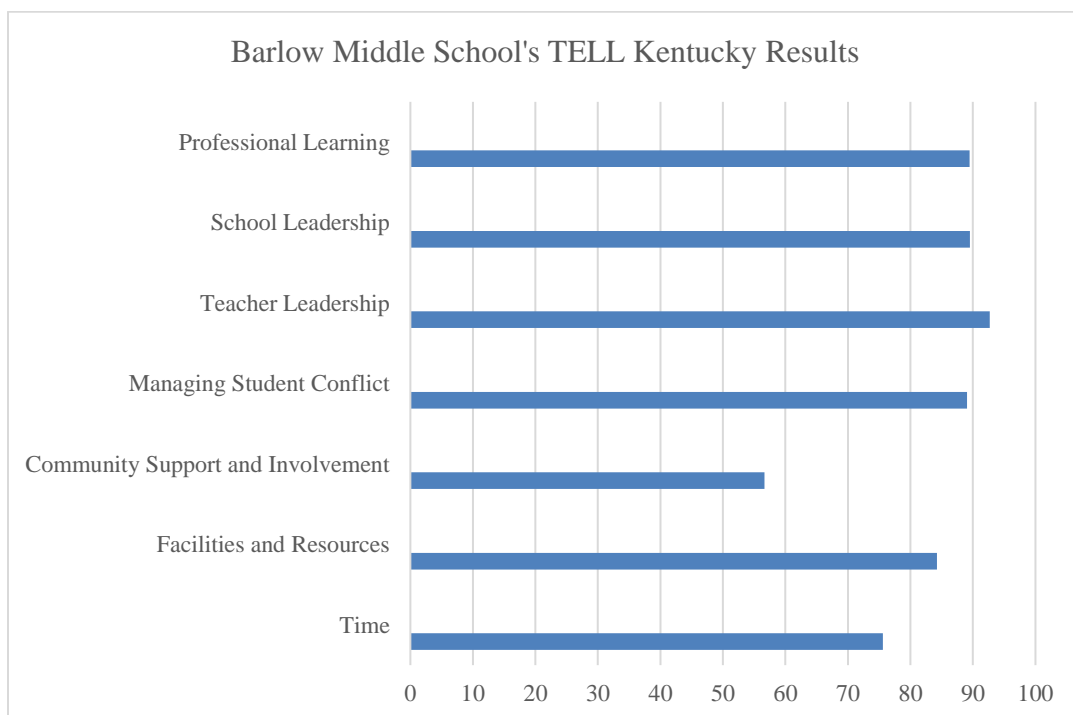


Figure 5. Barlow Middle School's 2017 / 18 TELL KY Results by percentage.

Crestview Middle School's staff agreed that they had a strong school leadership with a 91% rating (see Figure 6). Although the rating was strong for school leadership, only 81% of the teachers felt they were given opportunities for leadership, the lowest among all the schools included in the study. A total of 94% of the staff felt they had enough instructional practices support to teach their students. This figure is high compared to only 67% of new teachers feeling they had enough support to be successful, the lowest of all schools included in the study. A total of 94% of the staff felt they had strong community support and involvement. Most of the staff felt they had adequate facilities and resources to teach with a 97% rating. School leadership's ability to manage student conflict and give teachers enough time to prepare and teach students were both rated below 90% with 88% and 83% rating, respectively. A total of 97% of the staff felt they had enough professional learning to teach their assigned content.

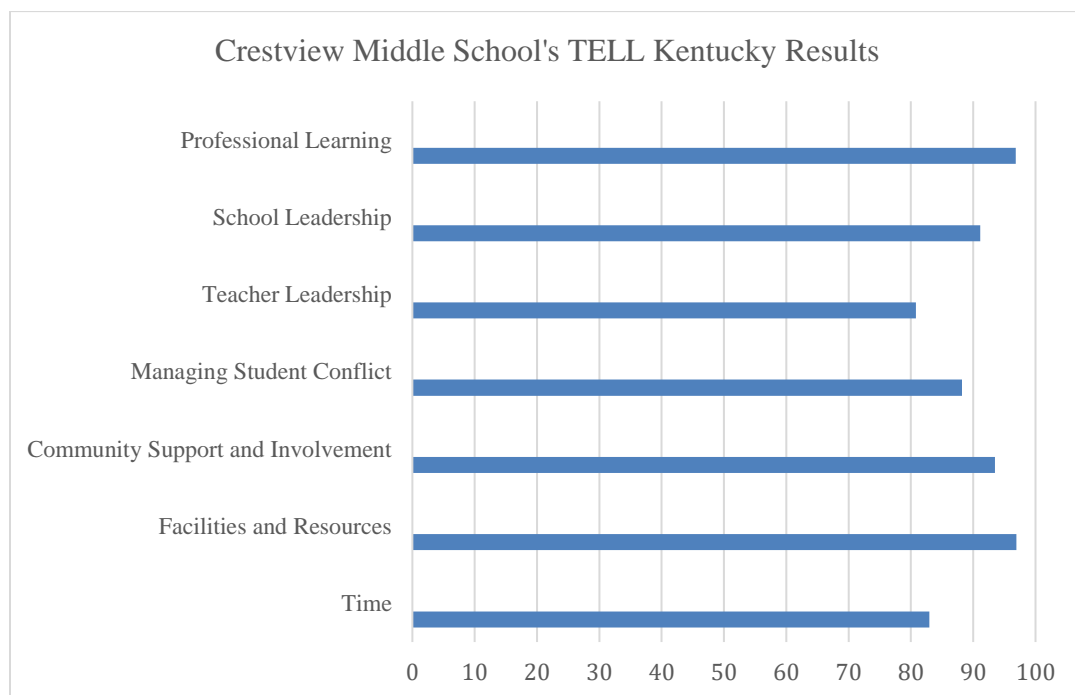


Figure 6. Crestview Middle School's 2017 / 18 TELL KY Results by percentage.

Devlin Middle School posted the lowest overall average for educational support of all of the schools included in the study (see Figure 7). The staff reported they had strong school leadership with a 95% rating. Teacher leadership and instructional practices support both came in above 90% with respective ratings of 94% and 92% by teachers. A total of 100% of the staff felt they had strong support for new teachers, the highest of all of the schools included in the study. A total of 91% of the staff felt they had strong community support and involvement in their school. Most of the staff reported having adequate facilities and resources to teach their students with a 94% rating. A total of 93% of the staff felt that their school leadership effectively managed student conflict. Only 69% of the staff felt they had adequate time to plan and teach assigned content to their students, the lowest recorded for all the schools included in the study. A total of 92% of the staff felt they had enough professional learning opportunities to teach their students.

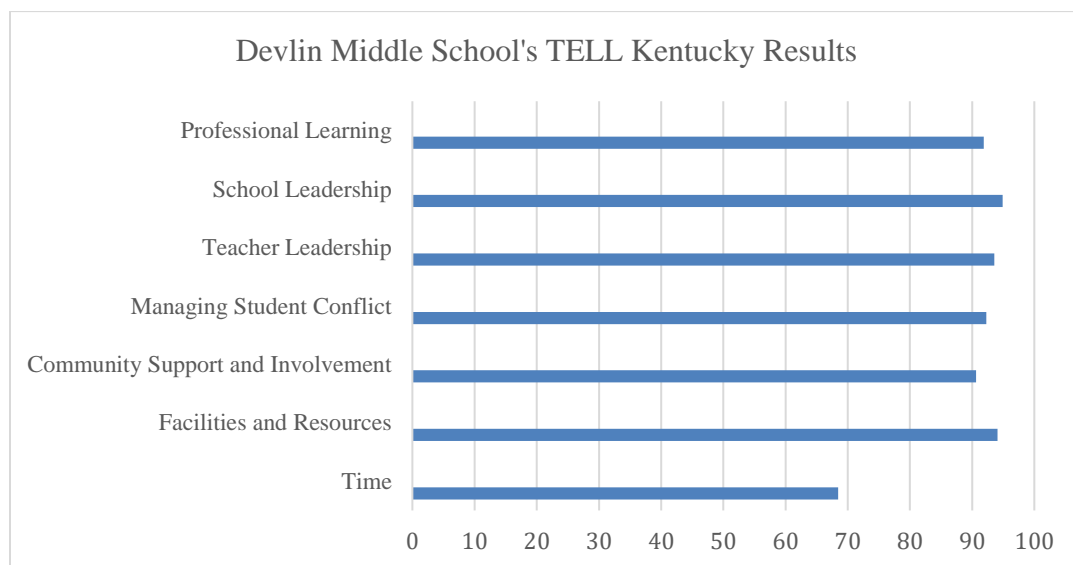


Figure 7. Devlin Middle School's 2017 / 18 TELL KY Results by percentage.

The overall percentage of teachers who felt positive about their school's leadership was 94%. The percentage of teachers who felt they were supported and recognized as teacher leaders were 91%. Teachers felt they had strong instructional

practices and support, as evidenced by the overall percentage of 94%. New teachers felt supported at an 86% level. Teachers felt they had strong community engagement at an 85% level. Teachers felt that the facility and resources were managed well with a score of 94%. The majority of teachers, 93%, felt student conduct was managed by leadership. Time was protected and efficient at a level of 81%. Professional Learning was encouraged and supported by the leadership at a 95% level. See Table 10 for a complete breakdown of each school's TELL Kentucky Survey results.

The data for all schools support that there is strong leadership existing in some form in all of the schools. All of the areas reported through the TELL KY Survey indicate that the majority of staff at the schools included in the study feel that they have some form of an educational leader guiding their schools. While the data indicate the existence of educational leadership, the data also identify opportunities for growth, especially in the areas of new teacher support and community engagement and support.

Table 10

TELL Kentucky Survey Data on Participant Schools

TELL Kentucky Survey Categories	Schools			
	Albright ES	Barlow MS	Crestview MS	Devlin MS
Time	95	76	83	69
Facilities and Resources	100	84	97	94
Community Support and Involvement	100	57	94	91
Managing Student Conflict	100	89	88	92
Teacher Leadership	97	93	81	94
School Leadership	99	90	91	95
Professional Learning	100	90	97	92
Instructional Practices support	100	91	94	92
New Teacher Support	86	89	67	100

Note. Adapted from Kentucky Department of Education's 2017 KY TELL Survey Results indicating the percentage of staff who strongly agree they are supported in the identified areas.

Summary of Descriptive Findings

Each administrator included in the study was first analyzed as an independent case to understand how his or her teachers felt about the leadership in the school through the TELL KY Survey results. Also, information from Kentucky's Department of Education's School Report Card was analyzed for each school to gain a deeper understanding of the mediating factors that could affect their school's results such as the number of students classified as disadvantaged as well as the number of novice teachers working at the school. Finally, the output of student assessment scores was reviewed for each school in the areas of reading and mathematics. Once the schools were analyzed independently, they were analyzed collectively to identify patterns and trends aligned to the research questions to gain an understanding of the leadership abilities of all graduates from the regional principal preparation program.

The primary research question of this study asked if graduates from a regional university's principal preparation program equipped them with the leadership skills and experiences necessary to successfully function as an instructional leader in today's challenging school environment. The answer to that question required two subsidiary research questions asked of recent graduates. The first subsidiary research questions asked if novice administrators feel their university's content and program design supported the acquisition of the NELP Building Standards. Upon analysis of each administrator's school data collected from the TELL KY Survey, Kentucky State Report Cards, and state assessment results, it appears that each of the administrators selected for this study had been well prepared to perform leadership duties at their school. All of the administrators performed well in the areas of Facilities and Resources, Managing Student

Conflict, School Leadership, Professional Learning, and Instructional Practices Support, with average percentages of 88% or greater in each of those categories (see Table 10).

However, when the results were analyzed for the categories of Time, Community Support and Involvement, Teacher Leadership, and New Teacher Support, you arrive at a feeling that more attention and training were needed based on the mixed results reported. Devlin Middle School posted the lowest score in the area of Time (69%); however, they scored the highest in the area of New Teacher Support (100%). The ratings possibly signal that while Billy needs to focus on securing more time for his staff to complete the requirements placed upon them, new teachers feel supported. Albright Elementary School posted a 100% in Community Involvement while scoring only 86% in support of new teachers. Crestview Middle School scored an 81% in Teacher Leadership, as well as only a 67% in New Teacher Support, both of which speak to how teachers feel empowered to contribute to the direction of the school and to perform the basic functions required of them in the classroom. Barlow Middle School had the lowest score in Community Support and Involvement with only a 57% rating. Kathy's school also struggled to give her teachers the necessary time to teach based on a 76% rating. See Table 10 for a complete breakdown of the TELL KY Survey categories.

The NELP standards for principals focus on attributes that extend beyond basic educational leadership to include ethics and equity. The struggles exhibited by several of the schools in the areas of new teacher support and time speak to the NELP categories of equity, instructional leadership, operations and management, and building professional capacity indicating that while the TELL KY Survey results support strong leadership, they are not congruent to the assessment results for the middle school students. To be

viewed as an effective leader, there must be a confluence of both strong teacher ratings and high student academic results.

The second subsidiary research question of the study asked about the relative strengths and weaknesses of a regional university's principal preparation program, as perceived by recent graduates who are novice administrators. The ability to answer this question required more in-depth analysis that extended beyond the information gained from the analysis of the TELL KY Survey, Kentucky Assessment Results, and demographic data from the Kentucky State Report Card results. To that extent, interview questions were designed to gain a more rich and in-depth understanding of each participants' abilities as an educational leader. The interview questions, combined with the results of TELL KY Survey results, Kentucky Assessment Data, and Kentucky State Report Card demographic data provide an understanding of how prepared recent graduates were for the rigors of educational leadership assessed by the NELP Building Standards and what parts of their programming were strengths and what parts were perceived weaknesses to gaining the skills required of today's educational leaders.

Qualitative Analysis

The data collected and analyzed from the TELL KY survey results and the Kentucky State Report Card data support that the administrators included in the study, were successful and prepared for most of the rigors in educational leadership. The focus of the second research question requires a deeper analysis to determine if recent graduates felt that their principal preparation program equipped them for success in educational leadership. The professional preparation and experiences were captured by the responses recorded during the interview process. Each administrator was asked to

indicate the number of years in education in order to gain an understanding of the amount of experience they brought with them to their school. They were also asked to break that experience down to how long they had been employed in their current district as compared to other districts. They were also asked to list the total amount of time they had been in an administrative position to give insight into how that experience might affect their ability to lead their school. Finally, to verify once again that they were recent graduates, they were asked to confirm how long they had been finished with their principal preparation program. A complete listing of their responses is listed in Table 7.

The process for analyzing the leadership abilities of each administrator during the interviews followed a specific set of procedures. While conducting each interview, the conversation was recorded utilizing the program Rev.com call recorder. After each interview, the interview was automatically uploaded to Rev.com for transcription. Upon receipt of the transcript, the researcher conducted member checks by sending transcripts of the interview to each administrator to verify that his or her experiences and responses to the interview questions were effectively captured. All of the administrators verified that their transcript accurately captured their experiences and responses to the interview questions. Upon member check confirmation, the researcher coded the responses utilizing the 12 program and leadership standards developed by UCEA for the delivery of their INSPIRE Graduate survey. These are listed below.

1. Rigor and Relevance
2. Faculty Quality
3. Peer Relationships
4. Program Accessibility

5. Internship/Residency Design and Quality
6. Ethical and Professional Norms
7. Strategic Leadership
8. Operations and Management
9. Instructional Leadership
10. Professional and Organizational Culture
11. Supportive and Equitable Learning Environment
12. Family and Community Relations

Once the initial coding was completed (see Table 11), the researcher asked an educational consultant with experience in training principals to review each transcript and code to the initial 12 categories. Inter-rater reliability was utilized to increase the reliability of the coded data and pattern recognition. The professional selected currently works with a regional cooperative assisting teachers and administrators in effective strategies to deliver content and increase student achievement. She has over 22 years of education experience, with 8 of those years working with teachers and administrators. She has completed her master's degree and is currently pursuing a doctorate. She has held the following positions: regular education teacher Grades K – 5; elementary instructional coach; and education consultant in the areas of mathematics, mindfulness, and mindset theory. She currently has the following certifications in Kentucky: K-6 Education, Mathematics for Grades 5-9, Supervisor of Instruction, Principal, and Superintendency. Her experiences, combined with her certifications prove testament to her abilities in coding data and performing cross-case analysis of independently coded data.

Table 11

Initial Coding Categories Linked with NELP Building Level Standards

	Initial Coding Categories	NELP Building Standards
1.	Rigor & Relevance	Vision, Mission and Core Values
2.	Faculty Quality	Ethics and Professional Norms
3.	Peer Relationships	Equity and Cultural Leadership
4.	Program Accessibility	Instructional Leadership
5.	Internship/Residency Design	Community and External Leadership
6.	Ethical & Professional Norms	Operations Management
7.	Strategic Leadership	Building Professional Capacity
8.	Operations & Management	The Internship
9.	Instructional Leadership	
10.	Professional & Organizational Culture	
11.	Supportive & Equitable Learning Environment	
12.	Family & Community Relations	

Note. Adapted from the INSPIRE-G Item Matrix and the NELP Standards (Young et al., 2016).

Prior to conducting the independent scoring of the interviews, discussions were held regarding the initial coding categories. After the initial coding was completed, the coding was reviewed and compared to note any discrepancies between the ratings given by the researcher and the education consultant. The interviews were then coded again by both the researcher and the education consultant utilizing open coding to capture responses that fell outside the initial 12 program and leadership categories. The new categories were then compared for each interview. After debating the new categories, agreement was reached on the new categories and where each administrator's responses were coded. Once the individual interviews were coded, they were analyzed collectively to determine patterns. The researcher and the education consultant analyzed the interviews collectively and then discussed emerging patterns, arriving at a consensus on the patterns that emerged through cross-case analysis.

Summary of Interview Responses

The administrators who participated in the study provided responses for each question related to a particular program component or leadership standard. Their responses provided insight and answers to the Primary Research Question, Subsidiary Research Question 1, and Subsidiary Research Question 2. Key points analyzed from each of the administrator's interviews are broken down by each of the 12 program and leadership categories. In addition to the 12 program and leadership categories, key points that fell into additional categories are listed to create rich, thick detail of the administrators' perception of how their university's principal preparation program equipped them for leadership readiness. Background information on each administrator is presented in Table 8. The full detail of each administrator's response to each question may be found in Appendix C.

Program and Leadership Standard # 1: Rigor and Relevance. This standard applies to how the principal preparation programming work provided a coherent learning experience delivered in a challenging and intellectually stimulating environment.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally has just finished her second year as an administrator with a total of eight years in education, all of which were in her current district. She currently holds a master's degree. Sally stated she was "surprised" to find that two main parts of her job were areas that were barely covered by her principal preparation program, adding that she felt "wholly disconnected" from the amount and variety of work required of administrators. She followed with that the practice from projects given through the principal preparation program "enhanced" her abilities to work with students and teachers.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy was the longest-tenured educator in the study. Of the 20 years in education, she served 19 of those in her current district. She is finishing her 6th year as an administrator and also has a master's degree. Kathy described many of her duties at her school "connected" to the information she learned from her principal preparation program. She stated that tasks required in the program related to her school consistently throughout her courses. In particular, she cited how her programming *really* went into depth on contracts.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy is currently finishing his first year as an administrator. While he has 13 years in education, he has the shortest tenure of all of the administrators in their current district, serving only four years in his district. Jeremy stated that his experience in his principal preparation program equipped him to lead professional developments with his staff by requiring multiple opportunities to present research or project information in front of other students in the class. He went on to state that while he can write a paper "all day long," it does not mean he knows how to perform the task associated with the writing. He went on to state he did not feel the program prepared him for everything associated with building management, citing that he did not think "you can understand while you are in class," referring to budgeting.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy is completing his first year as an administrator with 19 years in education. He has served ten years in his current district and has earned his master's degree. Billy stated that the situation scenarios that students were required to go through during the principal preparation program were "very relevant to what the real world is." Billy added that the anchor assessments tied coursework to things that were at his school. He concluded that he felt there were no "irrelevant" assignments given

throughout the program and that all assignments were either, “A) Related to your school, or B) Were relevant to what you may encounter.”

Summary of Administrators’ Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 1.

All of the administrators felt that parts of their principal preparation program were relevant to the demands of educational leadership. The overall impression was that there was a sense of coherent learning experiences throughout the program. Some of the aspects of the program proved “redundant,” such as the multiple writing assignments to Jeremy, while the others stated that they did not do any “irrelevant” assignments or “busy work.” The students stated that scenario-based projects provided them with the most challenging and stimulating lesson that was relevant to the actual realities of the principalship. If anything, the program could benefit from less “theory” and more “practice,” commented Kathy.

Program and Leadership Standard # 2: Faculty Quality. The standard of faculty quality addresses whether the students felt that the instructors in their principal preparation program were both responsive and knowledgeable.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally's response began by saying that she felt the faculty was “excellent” and committed to “authentic” instruction. Sally further commented that the phenomenal staff of her principal preparation program was honestly one of the best parts of her experience. The personalities of the staff lent themselves to “transparent communication,” allowing open sharing of their personal experiences to place a more “practical lens on the often theoretical focus of academia.”

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy stated the way the faculty presented information led to “no surprises” in the programming. She felt that the instructors were good at making connections with students. She felt that the teachers were able to deliver the programming in such a manner that it allowed her to be able to “relate” to most of the coursework. She went on to add that the faculty was “very” attentive to their students’ needs, further stating that they were very “insightful, caring, and personable.” She went on to add that the faculty in her program had been the “most informative instructors she had had in all of her professional careers.”

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy characterized his instructors as making sure resources were available, and if the students needed anything, the instructors made sure they secured the resources for the students. The instructors also “weighed the odds” of decisions and resources, allowing students to determine if they fit the current needs of the school and staff.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy’s responses to other program questions illustrated that he felt the faculty delivered a program that was responsive to his needs and relevant. He never stated that an assignment was irrelevant or that faculty was unapproachable should a need arise. His lack of specific experiences that he felt unprepared for speaks to the knowledge of his instructors.

Summary of Administrators’ Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 2.

All of the administrators included in the study felt that their instructors were knowledgeable about the content they were teaching and even cited the willingness of the instructors to share personal experiences as “enhancing the program.” While Billy did not

comment directly on the quality of the faculty, his responses to other content and program questions echoed the transparency and preparedness of faculty share by the other administrators in the study.

Program and Leadership Standard # 3: Peer Relationship. The Peer Relationship standard addresses whether interactions with fellow students have had a positive influence on the professional growth of the administrator.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally felt that the program was enhanced through “cohorts,” which required students to go through core classes together. This sentiment was shared by all of the other administrators in the study. She also stated that there was “value in the networking opportunities.”

Administrator 2: Kathy. In addition to valuing the cohort model, Kathy stated that she felt it was enriching to have the same group of people because we could “compare and contrast” information about what they learned in class and how it can be applied to their situation. The students in the cohort created what she called a “professional community” you could trust and bounce ideas off with confidence.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy added that he continues to use his fellow students even after graduation. They serve as a “support group” that has allowed him to bounce ideas off, and he considers the cohort model one of the best components of the program. He credits his fellow students as the reason he can successfully get up in front of his teachers to present research or professional development.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy stated he developed some relationships through the cohort model and still has e-mails and cell phone numbers for his fellow students. He followed up with saying it was great for “building a network of professional friends” that

you can talk to about situations at your school. It was the first time he had been involved in a cohort model of any kind.

Summary of Administrators' Response to Program and Leadership Standard # 3.

All of the administrators felt they had good relationships with their peers. They credited the cohort model by creating relationships that aided them throughout the program. These relationships created during the program have turned into professional networks that assist them in working through challenging leadership activities they find themselves grappling with as administrators.

Program and Leadership Standard # 4: Program Accessibility. Program Accessibility addresses if the classes and activities were offered at convenient times and days at convenient locations.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally did not mention any barriers or issues with program accessibility or locations when describing areas of improvement associated with the principal preparation programming.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy stated she had no issues with program accessibility and even cited that if she needed to get in touch with a professor, she did not have to come to the school. She could utilize video chat to answer any questions she had or to clarify an assignment.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy, similar to Sally, did not list program locations, meeting times, or dates as a barrier to program completion.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy stated he felt the meeting times and dates allowed them to meet at least a couple of times a semester in person as well as online. The

number of face-to-face meetings, coupled with the online meetings, allowed for relationships to be formed.

Summary of Administrators' Response to Program and Leadership Standard

4.

None of the administrators mentioned that program accessibility was an issue or an impediment towards program completion. The comments that were specific to program accessibility were positive, noting multiple platforms for meeting with both staff and fellow students in creating positive relationships and clarifying assignments.

Program and Leadership Standard # 5: Internship/Residency Design and Quality. The standard of Internship/Residency Design and Quality addresses whether or not the internship was supervised by knowledgeable school leaders and if it enabled students to develop a practice of engaging peers and colleagues in shared problem solving and collaboration.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally originally responded to the type of support she received for her internship with a confusing, “none to my knowledge.” However, as she answered and moved further along with the interview questions, she cited her apprenticeship as a “key to enhancing her abilities” as an educational leader. Sally’s answer was clear evidence of her not understanding the initial question related to internship support.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy felt that she had support as she completed her fieldwork, as her principal was also her supervisor. She was knowledgeable and assisted Kathy with getting all the information she needed, assisting her in setting up a “time-line” on how she should complete her assigned tasks. Kathy went on to say that her professors

would check in with her on a regular basis to check her status and would assist her if she needed help.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy added the most information about the internship. He stated that while he had an internship, he struggled with getting a handle on how to handle certain things because the principal was always busy handling issues, and confidentiality became a barrier to getting more involved at the school where he was assigned. He also stated that he wished he had a little more time away from his school to see other schools and be with other administrators, citing a wish that his university did a better job of arranging times and opportunities to work with other people at other schools. Jeremy stated that there are valuable things to learn from other schools, such as how parents and students are different.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy felt that the university's internship was "awesome." The internship allowed him to partner with one of his sister schools that allowed the principal from that school to review his work with him and his current principal, enhancing his understanding. Billy went on to state that gaining a mentor from another school gave you a "different viewpoint" and proved very beneficial.

Summary of Administrators' Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 5.

The internship experience is a unique part of any principal preparation program. All of the administrators valued the knowledge gained through their internship/apprenticeship experiences within their principal preparation program. Each of the administrators stated it was well supported and provided valuable insight into educational leadership responsibilities.

Program and Leadership Standard # 6: Ethical and Professional Norms. The Ethical and Professional Norms standards describe how well the principal preparation program prepared students to act in an open and transparent manner and as a moral compass for their school.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally stated that ethical leadership was a “common theme” in most, if not all of the courses. The experiences gained in her principal preparation program necessitated “continuous refinement and reflection” on ethical practices.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy felt she had a pretty good command of ethics prior to enrolling in her principal preparation program. However, she stated that understanding “norms” and how to “deal” with personnel issues proved beneficial as the instructors went through various effective methods of personnel management.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy’s response was a little different than that of Kathy’s. He stated that he felt he needed a little more time on establishing professional norms with your staff. He feels he spends a lot of time dealing with ethical dilemmas and could have benefited from spending a “whole lot more time” on that subject as the School Law class was the only class that really spent any time on the subject.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy echoed Jeremy’s response in that they did discuss ethics and norms. He remembers some discussions on Canvas and how you might handle this situation or that situation. However, Billy felt that the instructors covered it as best as possible in the classroom.

Summary of Administrators' Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 6.

The administrators all agree that ethics and norms were covered in their programming. However, there is a consensus that more attention needs to be paid to creating more instructional opportunities centered on establishing professional norms, especially when negative staff is involved. This correlates to the information contained in the TELL KY survey as Jeremy's school scored only 80.79% in Teacher Leadership. This was confirmed during the interviews by specific comments or lack of comments made by each of the administrators.

Program and Leadership Standard # 7: Strategic Leadership. The program and leadership standard of strategic leadership rates how well the principal preparation program prepared students to lead change efforts and use school data to promote school improvement.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally stated that she felt "prepared" to create a values-based vision for her school. She also stated she felt equipped to cultivate that vision through positive "climate and culture." She supports that claim by adding she felt "thoroughly" prepared to create a positive culture and climate needed to create the values-based vision.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy echoed Sally's response by stating she "absolutely" felt prepared to develop her school's vision, mission, and core values. She added that as she went through the program, she would frequently converse with one of her cohort members about something occurring in their school and linking it back to a

paper we wrote about the same situation in class. She stated she was able to adapt her “real” situation, to the practice situations performed and reported on in class.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy stated that, if anything, they spent “too much time” on strategic leadership. He said it began to feel redundant as each semester they were “talking about the same stuff.” So, he felt prepared for this responsibility when he began his administrative position.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy’s experiences mirrored the other administrators’ experiences in the coursework on strategic leadership. Billy stated that because of the training they received through the program, they were able to redo his school’s outdated mission statements. This allowed for a practical application of taught material. He credits his class to give him the ability to put the new mission and vision statements in front of his faculty resulting in the adoption of a new vision.

Summary of Administrators’ Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 7.

All of the administrators agree that the coursework associated with strategic leadership was sufficient in providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop their school's vision and mission statements. This correlates to the information found in the TELL KY survey data from each of the participants’ schools as Vision, Mission, and Core Values averaged a 94% rating for all schools participating in the study. If anything, some felt that too much time was spent on the topics creating a possible loss of opportunity to develop another critical leadership area.

Program and Leadership Standard # 8: Operations and Management. The program and leadership standard of Operations and Management assesses how well the

program prepares students to manage school resources effectively and efficiently to support the school vision. It also measures how prepared the students were to recruit, hire, and retain high-quality personnel.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally felt she was unprepared for the responsibility of operating and managing a school. She stated she felt “wholly disconnected from the true amount of work involved in administration.” She elaborated on the responsibilities of interactions and collaborations with district personnel were foreign to her.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy’s experience was a little different than that of Sally’s. She stated they were required to complete a school budget, noting where the money was coming from and where they would place the money. The program required them to take a “Red Book” class, and it gave clarity to a subject she knew nothing about. Regarding managing the building, she continues to struggle with that aspect of school leadership. The class project that required her to remodel a building was one of her toughest challenges in the program, and she still struggles with that aspect of school leadership.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy responded that he felt you could not learn about building management in class as he did not learn what he feels is needed to be a principal. He says that part of the issue may be that many districts, including his, handles all of the money, so he was not able to apply what he was taught to his current administrative list of responsibilities. He went further to say that he does not feel the program prepared him for the management aspect of school leadership. He felt the courses only covered the “safety aspect” of building management. They never really

talked about building management but in maybe one class. He added that they really never had any assignments covering building management.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy's account differed from that of Jeremy's in that he felt the coursework centered on building management was relevant and prepared him for the financial responsibilities associated with leading a school. He stated that he "analyzed" a budget from the district level creating an "eye-opening" experience. Through the requirements of the project, he was able to interview his school finance officer to obtain a better understanding of fiscal management.

Summary of Administrators' Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 8.

Sally's and Jeremy's responses indicate that they felt the coursework associated with operations and management of a school was inadequate, leaving them unprepared for the responsibilities associated with managing a school. Sally's feeling is in contrast to the results of the TELL KY survey for her school, as her teachers rated an average of 99% in areas associated with Operations Management. Jeremy's feelings correlated with the areas of Time and Managing Student Conflict but were in contrast to Facility and Resources as his school scored 97% in that area. However, Kathy and Billy's experiences left them educated, prepared, and confident to manage a school and its resources. The TELL KY survey data contrasts their feelings of preparedness as Kathy's school scored the lowest average overall, with 83% in the areas of Operations Management. Billy, on the other hand, scored well in the TELL KY survey categories of Facilities and Resources and Managing Student Conflict but struggled with Time scoring only a 69% on the TELL KY survey results (see Table 17). It appears that Jeremy's lack of understanding could be,

in part, due to his inability to apply the knowledge that he learned in class to his administrative responsibilities.

Program and Leadership Standard # 9: Instructional Leadership. The program and leadership standard of Instructional Leadership rates how well the principal preparation program prepared students to provide constructive feedback for teachers to improve instruction while ensure culturally relevant teaching and learning are occurring.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally felt that the training she received related to instructional leadership was a strength of her program. The day to day responsibilities associated with instructional leadership required of administrators was captured in one of her projects and served as an extension to her work as an administrator. She stated she was given excellent advice from one of her professors to “stay in the trenches” and continue to work alongside teachers in the classroom.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy began by stating that “first and foremost, it has helped me understand instructional leadership.” She feels that the principal preparation program has taught her how to be an effective instructional leader by comparing and contrasting effective and ineffective instructional leadership strategies, relating it to work in her building. She stated she also had an understanding of how to help staff figure out what their area of expertise was and how they can use that skill set in the classroom. She also learned how to work with struggling teachers, “designing structures” that allowed them to observe other classrooms to enhance their instructional practices.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy stated that he feels the program prepared him to be the instructional leader for teachers who are new to the profession or who want to find better ways to teach. He does not feel prepared to handle “challenging teachers” that

are negative and do not desire to change or improve their instruction. Jeremy further clarifies by stating that he feels confident when he sees a need to try to assist the teacher in seeing that they do have a need. He also feels confident in finding a solution for that need utilizing different platforms available to assist the teacher in understanding the issue pertaining to their instruction.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy credited the program, and its use of “anchor assessments” as the catalyst he needed to clean up a program that was struggling. He felt prepared to conduct an analysis of data to determine what actions were needed to create a program that could better serve the needs of struggling readers.

Summary of Administrators’ Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 9.

Instructional leadership appears to be one of the strongest components of the principal preparation program. All of the administrators cited specific experiences that either enhanced their understanding of instructional leadership or educated them as to what instructional leadership is when viewed from an administrator's position. This correlates with the TELL KY survey data on Instructional Leadership as all administrators’ schools scored above 90% in this category (see Table 15). Jeremy’s comments about working with challenging various staff members that are set in their ways highlight an opportunity for growth in the programming by potentially creating more in-depth training on how to work with challenging staff to improve their ability to teach their students.

Program and Leadership Standard # 10: Professional and Organizational Culture. The program and leadership standard of Professional and Organizational Culture assesses how well the principal preparation program equipped students with the

skills required to create and sustain a collaborative environment that promotes innovation, collaboration, inclusiveness, and is culturally responsive.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally credited the “mediation” strategies learned through her programming for the success she has had with countless difficult conversations with her staff. Sally stated she was not prepared for the ways that an “autonomous” culture can be in contrast to a “collaborative” culture proving difficult for her to balance the need for professional freedom with the proper amount of support. She also credits her programming with teaching her how to solicit appropriate stakeholder input into how to increase engagement in programs such as adult education.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy stated that a project required of her through the program required her to conduct a new teacher induction to her school as well as set up mentoring programs to connect teachers, allowing them to feel like they are part of the “family.”

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy’s experience left him wanting as he still struggles with how to address teachers who are “not doing what they should be doing.” Jeremy states it is difficult for him to know how to deal with telling the staff there needs to be a correction. He struggles with when he is going to “overstep” when dealing with tough situations. Again, as stated earlier, he believes he is equipped to handle staff that wants to change.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy echoed Jeremy’s statements that dealing with uncomfortable conversations with teachers and other staff is something he did not anticipate. It has been his most challenging duty as an administrator. Billy further comments that while they did “role play” a situation in class that dealt with difficult

conversations and he had some training in a difficult conversation, his earlier responses identified a need for additional training. Billy went on to state that there was “substantial” time spent on setting the school’s culture, creating positive school culture, or improving a negative one.

Summary of Administrators’ Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 10. Each of the administrators included in the study stated that time was spent during their programming on organizational culture. However, based on the comments and experiences, it appears that more time needs to be spent on dealing with difficult staff, which can negatively affect efforts to create a positive culture necessary to promote innovative and creative instruction that is relevant to the diverse needs of students. This feeling of more support and training contrasts the results reported in the TELL KY survey for Equity and Cultural Learning as every school except for Jeremy’s scored over 90% in the areas of School Leadership and Teacher Leadership. Jeremy’s school struggled with Teacher Leadership with a score of 81% which correlates to his feeling unprepared to work with negative teachers (see Table 14).

Program and Leadership Standard # 11: Supportive and Equitable Learning

Environment. The program and leadership standard of Supportive and Equitable Learning Environment assesses a principal preparation program’s ability to prepare students to create an equitable and inclusive environment that promotes trusting relationships.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally stated that she felt the “change models” learned through her program helped her create the necessary steps required for genuine staff buy-

in. However, she felt “underprepared” when it came to creating equity required in programs such as special education.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy’s experiences allowed her to “better understand the needs of her students,” as she creates the year’s master schedule. She also had a unique knowledge base that allowed her to serve as a resource for other cohort members regarding equity. The programming allowed for her knowledge to be shared with her fellow cohort members.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy stated that while he struggles with working with difficult staff that could erode trust among staff, he did feel confident in promoting new programs. Jeremy stated that one of the projects he created in his program required him to create a program, so he chose a “mentor program” to create. He then presented his work to his district office, and they adopted a new mentor program based on work completed in his class. He went on to add throughout the program it was ingrained in students that when you tackle equity issues, that as a rule of thumb, you stay focused on your mission and vision of your school to ensure any changes align with your mission and vision.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy stated that the major struggle he has regarding building and maintaining trust is dealing with “difficult staff.” He stated he has difficulty addressing “good teachers” who cannot get along with others.

Summary of Administrators’ Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 11. Each administrator had different experiences with their programming regarding creating a supportive learning environment. While the program allowed for personal experiences to be shared as illustrated in Kathy’s responses allowing for

enhanced learning for her fellow cohort members, Billy and Jeremy struggled with how to create and maintain trust when there is a negative staff member in play. Sally felt she was adequately prepared but struggled when it came to specialized programming such as special education. Billy, Jeremy, and Sally's comments illustrate a need to develop additional program components to address specific programming and dealing with difficult, challenging staff. This need contrasts the majority of the results reported in the TELL KY survey data for Equity and Cultural Leadership, with only Jeremy's school reporting a percentage of less than 90% in any of the categories related to a Supportive and Equitable Learning Environment (see Table 13).

Program and Leadership Standard # 12: Family and Community Relations.

The program and leadership standard of Family and Community Relations rate a principal preparation program's ability to prepare students to communicate and engage with families and caregivers. The standard also addresses the student's ability to promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse resources.

Administrator 1: Sally. Sally cited the requirement to complete a community project with "external partners" as being a valuable component of the program. She went on to comment that the project was intentionally vague due to the reality that community needs are so variable.

Administrator 2: Kathy. Kathy stated that she took a class on how to get the community involved in your school, giving her specific strategies on ways to create more community involvement. She went on to say that a project required her to write out a script on how she would interact with the community partner and how she would handle herself when something happens in the community.

Administrator 3: Jeremy. Jeremy felt that the class he took in the program prepared him to work with the community. More importantly, he stated he now understands how to find a community avenue that could fill a need in his school.

Administrator 4: Billy. Billy agreed with Jeremy and felt that an assignment required of them in class prepared him to effectively work with the community to find solutions to the needs of his school.

Summary of Administrators' Response to Program and Leadership

Standard # 12. All of the administrators felt they were prepared to work with the community. Jeremy captured the feeling of all of the administrators when he stated that the programming not only taught you how to work with your community but how to identify and match community resources to the needs of your school. All of the administrators' TELL KY survey results, except for Kathy's school, correlates with the feeling they were prepared to work with the community. Kathy's school scored the lowest of all of the schools with only a 57% rating in the area of Community and External Leadership on the TELL KY survey results (see Table 16).

Summary of Interview Responses and TELL KY Survey Data to NELP Building Standards

The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Standards are designed to serve as a gauge to principals' ability to effectively govern their ability to provide effective leadership for their staff, students, and community. To allow an analysis of each participant's perception of his or her leadership readiness, interview responses and TELL KY survey results were coded and analyzed against each NELP Building Standard (see Tables 12 - 19).

Table 12

Vision, Mission, and Core Values

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
Sally	-Learned multiple communication strategies -Tools she acquired in the program assisted her in gaining stakeholder input	99% SL
Kathy	-Learning leadership traits allowed her to better communication with staff -Allowed us to use our experiences in class -Absolutely helped in establishing vision and mission	90% SL
Jeremy	-Aided in working with teachers who want to change -Not prepared to handle negative teachers -The program forced to attend SBDM meeting and work with active principals was beneficial -Vision and mission focus was present in several classes	91% SL
Billy	-Prepared them for the rigors of educational leadership -Anchor assessments allowed them to work on real-world situations -Tools acquired assisted them in gaining stakeholder input	95% SL

Note. Interview responses gained from Interview Questions 4,5,6,7,& 8. TELL KY 2017 Survey results reported from School Leadership (SL) categories on the number of staff who agree they are strong in the identified areas.

Table 13

Ethics and Professional Norms

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
Sally	- Learned multiple communication strategies - Tools she assisted her with stakeholder input - Experiences in programming necessitated refinement and reflection on ethics continuously	99% SL 97% TL
Kathy	- Learning leadership traits allowed her to better communication with staff - Allowed us to use our experiences in class - Programming helped them understand ethical dilemmas and how to work with personnel involved	90% SL 93% TL
Jeremy	- Aided in working with teachers who want to change - Not prepared to handle negative teachers	91% SL 81% TL

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
	- Program somewhat assisted with ethical understandings and administrator responsibility	
Billy	- The program prepared them as much as possible to handle ethical dilemmas	95% SL
	- Anchor assessments allowed them to work on real-world situations	94% TL

Note. Interview responses gained from Interview Questions 4,5,6,7,8, & 9. TELL KY 2017 Survey results reported from School Leadership (SL) and the Teacher Leadership (TL) categories on the number of staff who agree they are strong in the identified areas.

Table 14

Equity and Cultural Leadership

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
Sally	- Learned multiple communication strategies	99% SL
	- Tools acquired assisted her with stakeholder input	97% TL
	- Change models learned assisted in school equity	
Kathy	- Learning leadership traits allowed her to better communication with staff	90% SL
	- Bringing personal experiences to Cohort discussions provided a realistic context regarding school equity	93% TL
Jeremy	- Aided in working with teachers who want to change	91% SL
	- Not prepared to handle negative teachers	81% TL
	- Spent much time on equity	
Billy	- Program handled school equity very well	95% SL
	- Anchor assessments allowed them to work on real-world situations	94% TL

Note. Interview responses gained from Interview Questions 4,5,6,7, & 10. TELL KY 2017 Survey results reported from School Leadership (SL) and Teacher Leadership (TL) categories on the number of staff who agree they are strong in the identified areas.

Table 15

Instructional Leadership

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
Sally	- Learned multiple communication strategies	100% IPS
	- Tools acquired assisted her with stakeholder input	
	- Projects/apprenticeship was key to enhancing her abilities as an instructional leader	
Kathy	- Learning leadership traits allowed her to better communication with staff	91% IPS

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
	- Helped her understand the need for instructional leadership	
Jeremy	- Aided in working with teachers who want to change - Not prepared to handle negative teachers - Good job of making sure implementation is critical to school success	94% IPS
Billy	- Focus on evaluation helped with instructional leadership - Anchor assessments allowed them to work on real-world situations	92% IPS

Note. Interview responses gained from Interview Questions 4,5,6,7, & 11. TELL KY 2017 Survey results reported from the Instructional Practice and Support (IPS) category on the number of staff who agree they are strong in the identified areas.

Table 16

Community and External Leadership

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
Sally	- Learned multiple communication strategies - Tools acquired assisted her with stakeholder input - Completing a community project with external partners was very valuable	100% CSI
Kathy	- Learning leadership traits allowed her to better communication with staff - Taught her how to get the community involved and create buy-in	57% CSI
Jeremy	- Good job of making sure implementation is critical to school success	94% CSI
Billy	- Had an assignment that involved all stakeholders in gaining outside business support - Anchor assessments allowed them to work on real-world situations	91% CSI

Note. Interview responses gained from Interview Questions 4,5,6,7, & 12. TELL KY 2017 Survey results reported from the Community Support and Involvement (CSI) category on the number of staff who agree they are strong in the identified areas.

Table 17

Operations Management

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
Sally	- Learned multiple communication strategies	100% FR
	- Tools acquired assisted her with stakeholder input	100% MSC
	- Tried to survive finance class	95% T
Kathy	- Leadership traits increased her communication skills	84% FR
	- Struggles with fiscal management of building	89% MSC
	- The program went into much detail on different types of staff who work in the school	76% T
	- Provided scenarios and examples of budgeting	
Jeremy	- Aided in working with teachers who want to change	97% FR
	- Not prepared to handle negative teachers	88% MSC
	- There was a lot of budgeting and management of a school that he could not understand in class	83% T
Billy	- Had a class in budgeting and fiscal management where they analyzed a budget from the district level	94% FR
	- Anchor assessments linked to real-world situations	92% MSC
		69% T

Note. Interview responses gained from Interview Questions 4,5,6,7, & 13. TELL KY 2017 Survey results reported from Facility & Resources (FR), Managing Student Conflict (MSC), and Time (T) categories on the number of staff who agree they are strong in the identified areas.

Table 18

Building Professional Capacity

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
Sally	- Learned multiple communication strategies	100% PL
	- Tools acquired assisted her with stakeholder input	
	- Taught her how to increase engagement in adults	
Kathy	- Leadership traits increased communication with staff	90% PL
	- Discussed needs assessment	
Jeremy	- Aided in working with teachers who want to change	97% PL
	- Not prepared to handle negative teachers	
	- Prepared him to deliver PD by presenting to the class	
Billy	- Created surveys and discussed how to design relevant PD for staff	92% PL
	- Anchor assessments allowed them to work on real-world situations	

Note. Interview responses gained from Interview Questions 4,5,6,7, & 14. TELL KY 2017 Survey results reported from the Professional Learning category on the number of staff who agree they are strong in the identified areas.

Table 19

The Internship

Participant	Interview Responses	TELL KY Survey Result
Sally	- Learned multiple communication strategies - No real intern support	n/a
Kathy	- Learning leadership traits allowed her to better communication with staff - Supportive when conducting fieldwork - Professors accessible at every juncture and most informative	n/a
Jeremy	- Aided in working with teachers who want to change - Not prepared to handle negative teachers - Lacked the level of support he feels he needed	n/a
Billy	- Beneficial to have a mentor with different viewpoints on school-related issues - Anchor assessments allowed them to work on real-world situations	n/a

Note. Interview responses gained from Interview Questions 4,5,6,7, & 15. TELL KY 2017 Survey results do not correlate to this NELP Building Standard.

Emerging Themes

The interviews were coded utilizing open coding in NVIVO, qualitative data analysis computer software. The initial coding categories linked to the program quality and leadership standards assessed through the INSPIRE-G survey were utilized for the initial coding of each interview (see Table 11) as a unique case. After each interview was coded, inter-rater reliability was utilized to ensure responses were accurately coded. Each interview represented a unique case. Coded responses were analyzed for patterns and relationships. After analysis of each case was complete, the interviews were analyzed collectively, using cross-case analysis. As patterns emerged when analyzing the interviews collectively, commonalities yielded additional coding categories. New coding categories were created, and each interview was re-coded to account for the new

categories as themes emerged from the analysis (see Table 20). The results from the comparisons yielded rich data and additional insight into each novice administrator's perceptions and experiences related to their principal preparation programming equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve success as an educational leader.

Table 20

Emerging Themes that address Subsidiary Research Questions

Subsidiary Research Questions	Themes	Strength (+) or Growth area (-)
Does the university's content and program design support acquisition of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Leadership Standards for novice administrators?	Cohort	+
	Group Projects	+
	Data Teams	+
	Class Presentations	+
	Anchor Assessments	+
How do recent graduates who attended a regional university perceive the relative strengths and weaknesses of their principal preparation program?	Anchor Assessments	+
	Quality Faculty	+
	Communication	-
	Managing Conflict	-
	Working with outside entities	+
	Practice-based learning	+

Note. Adapted from the INSPIRE-G Item Matrix and the NELP Building Standards (Young et al., 2016).

Common themes that emerged from administrator interviews on aspects of the programming that were viewed as “most valuable” in terms of helping understand program material and concepts were the following: cohorts, group projects, data teams, class presentations, and anchor statements. Billy credited cohorts as a critical component of his learning by stating, “Cohorts are great for building a network of professional friends that you can talk to.” Jeremy went on to add that he “keeps in constant contact with his cohort . . . reaching out to them” for advice on how to handle a situation. Group projects and class presentations were credited with creating new programs, as in Jeremy's case, when he utilized a group project to create a mentoring program needed in his county.

Through the research and work accomplished in class, he was able to convince his Central Office of the need for the mentoring program, and they tapped him to lead its implementation. Data teams were cited as critical in understanding data. Jeremy stated that the work with data teams and understanding how data affect learning has brought his staff to a new level of instruction. Anchor assessments were very relevant to what was going on, according to Billy. He stated that it brought the learning to life by allowing the use of situations “occurring at your school” instead of using “hypothetical situations.”

Areas of growth in communication and managing conflict emerged from the analysis of the data obtained through review of the participants’ interview responses. Communication with difficult parents and teachers appeared to be a pattern that emerged as the participants wish they had more time in class devoted to this topic. Jeremy stated that “he does not feel prepared to handle challenging teachers that are not willing to change or improve.” Billy also mentioned needing additional strategies regarding communication as that is one of his major struggles as he works “difficult staff.” Billy furthered his comment by stating it extends from working with difficult staff to helping staff work with each other as he stated he also has trouble managing “good teachers” who cannot get along with other staff.

Conclusion

The Primary Research Question of this study asked if recent graduates from a regional principal preparation program were equipped with the leadership skills and experiences necessary to successfully function as an instructional leader in today’s challenging school environment. Two subsidiary research questions were asked to gain insight into the effectiveness of a regional university's principal preparation program,

asking if novice administrators feel their university's content and program design supported the acquisition of the NELP Building Standards and what they perceived as strengths and weaknesses of their principal preparation program.

Interviews were developed to gather information from recent graduates who are serving as novice administrators. A focus group reviewed the questions and offered suggestions to ensure the interview questions aligned to the research questions. Four recent graduates were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. The responses were coded as individualized cases and then collectively, utilizing cross-case analysis to identify patterns. All of the administrators attested to some form of district support as they began their new administrative positions. The findings from the interviews offered thick, rich detail on their principal preparation programming experiences, depicting those experiences gained through their program as generally supportive and equipping them to be a school leader. The interview responses highlighted cohorts and faculties as areas of strength. The quality of the faculties was captured by Sally when she stated, "The phenomenal staff of my principal prep program... was honestly one of the best parts of my experience." The administrators participating in the survey identified the areas of internships and training on how to work with difficult students, staff, and parents as opportunities for growth. The participants stated the amount of time dedicated to difficult students, staff, and parents citing it as the "major" struggle they contend with during the day.

The TELL Kentucky survey results for each of the participants were reviewed in each of the correlating areas to the NELP Building Standards. The results were coded and reviewed against the interview responses looking for correlations or patterns of training

received through the principal preparation programming to the actual results depicted in the TELL KY survey. The results were fairly consistent with only minor contrasts occurring between administrators' feelings of preparedness and actual TELL KY survey data. When TELL KY survey data are coupled with demographic data and then compared to the interview responses of the administrators, strengths in the principal preparation programming areas of Strategic Leadership, Faculty, Peer Relationships, Program Accessibility, and Internship are validated. Utilizing the demographic data of the schools, along with the TELL KY survey data and interview responses, opportunities for growth emerge in the area of working with difficult staff and parents which crosses into the various program and leadership categories of Ethical and Professional Norms, Operations and Management, Professional and Organizational Culture, and Supportive and Equitable Learning Environment.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Educational leadership has evolved over the last few decades requiring administrators to serve as instructional leaders with above-average managerial skills able to transform cultures to meet the diverse needs of every student population (Robinson et al., 2008). The critical skills necessary for administrators to effectively lead schools required new standards to be developed to measure the abilities of today's educational leaders. These new standards provide clarity and focus for administrators now responsible for the vision, ethics, equity, instructional leadership, community relationships, and operations management for their school (Young, 2017).

Current principal preparation programming fails to equip graduates with the tools required to succeed in today's challenging educational environment (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Murphy et al., 2017; Young, 2015). The struggles that university principal preparation programs exhibit in developing effective principal leadership programming are they lack relevant curricular resources, have few research course requirements, implement low threshold demands, employ outdated teaching methods, and demonstrate a noticeable gap between working in the field and university programming (Crow, 2016; Nir, 2013). The identification and understanding of program strengths are critical to a meaningful review and evaluation of any program (Weiss, 1998). Common strengths of successful principal preparation programs referenced by the review of literature in this document are cohort models of learning, mentors, simulations, case studies, and professional guest speakers (Tubbs et al., 2011; Weiss, 1998).

The current qualitative case study was conducted to analyze novice administrators' experiences ($n = 4$) with a regional university's principal preparation programming in order to determine if the programming strengths and deficiencies at the regional university are consistent with principal preparation programming strengths and deficiencies documented in the research. The study is framed using the following research questions:

Primary Research Question.

In what ways are graduates from a regional university's principal preparation program equipped with the leadership skills and experiences necessary to successfully function as an instructional leader in today's challenging school environment?

Subsidiary Question 1.

Does the university's content and program design support acquisition of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Leadership Standards identified in the literature: (1) mission, vision, and improvement; (2) ethics and professional norms; (3) equity, inclusiveness, and cultural responsiveness; (4) learning and instruction; (5) community and external leadership; (6) operations and management; (7) building professional capacity; and (8) internship for novice administrators?

Subsidiary Question 2.

How do recent graduates who attended a regional university perceive the relative strengths and weaknesses of their principal preparation program?

Summary of Findings

According to Dembowski (2010), prior research has revealed no defining characteristic of what identifies a successful, capable leader. The findings from the current qualitative case-study support the current research outlined in the literature review that student success is directly linked to the leadership abilities of the school's principal (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Syed, 2015). The data collected from the current study can be used by universities to study current practices and validate prospective changes in programming to ensure the incorporation of strategies aligned to best practices. This study can also assist school districts that currently have principal leadership programs or looking to create a principal pipeline by providing information about the characteristics of innovative leadership preparation programs.

The current study utilized the newly drafted National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Building Standards as the foundation to measure the results from Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Kentucky surveys and novice administrators' interview responses ($n = 4$).

School data obtained from the Kentucky Department of Education from each administrator's school was reviewed and analyzed to provide context and validity to the TELL Kentucky survey results and interview responses. The responses from the interviews were initially coded utilizing the NELP Building Standards as initial categories. The researcher then reviewed the transcripts utilizing open coding to identify any additional categories not able to be placed in the initial eight categories. The TELL Kentucky survey results from each of the administrators' schools were then coded into

existing categories to triangulate the relationship between the participant's school and their interview responses. Each administrator was analyzed as an individual case, and then a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify patterns and document results to address the research questions with thick, rich data.

The results of the TELL Kentucky survey served to validate the effectiveness of each of the administrator's leadership abilities with the majority of the results being above the mean for Kentucky in the categories of Time (76.10%), Facilities and Resources (88.55%), Community Support and Involvement (85.88%), Managing Student Conflict (82.56%), Teacher Leadership (84.68%), School Leadership (86.94%), Professional Learning (86.31%), and Instructional Practices Support (89.88%). For the categories of Time and Instructional Practices, two of the administrator's schools fell below the state average. Three of the study's schools came in above the state average for Facilities and Resources, Teacher Leadership, and Community Support and Involvement. Likewise, categories of Managing Student Conflict, School Leadership, and Professional Learning all reported results above Kentucky schools' average.

The data collected from the TELL KY survey on Albright Elementary school indicated that there is strong educational leadership working at the school. While some staff felt that new teachers could benefit from additional support, the overall high teacher ratings indicate a supportive culture that encourages teacher leadership and provides the support and resources necessary for teachers to effectively teach their students.

While the ratings, taken as a whole for Barlow Middle School do not indicate a lack of educational leadership, they do indicate areas that need improvement as the

teachers' rating of community support and involvement in the school illustrates. Overall, the teachers felt supported and encouraged to take leadership roles when available.

Crestview Middle School's staff overwhelmingly felt they had strong leadership at the school, but only 67% of the teachers felt that new teachers had the support necessary to be successful. The lack of support for new teachers, coupled with the number of teachers who felt that they did not have enough time to prepare teaching plans for their students, indicates a need to critically look at the support strategies for new teachers as well as the workload required of all teachers.

The ratings from Devlin Middle School, while high for strong school leadership, posted average results for all the other categories with the exception of time. The lack of time necessary to effectively prepare to teach students and accomplish all the tasks required of the staff indicates a need for leadership to examine workload balances. If the staff continue to lack the necessary time to fulfill their duties as assigned, frustration could set in, and the culture would begin to degrade, causing a cascade of failures, ultimately harming students' opportunity for success.

Upon coding and analysis of the interviews and TELL Kentucky survey data, patterns that emerged from collected data were noted and documented. The data collected through the individual analysis of each administrator as an individual case and then performing cross-case analysis allowed for the identification of attributes principal preparation programming must have to prepare students for the rigors of educational leadership. The critical attributes corresponded to cohorts, quality of faculty, program structure, practical experience, internships, and communication strategies listed in the literature review.

All but one of the administrators were adamant that the inclusion of the cohort model in their principal preparation programming was critical to their success. This consensus is consistent with the research in the literature about critical components of an effective principal leadership program. Of the one administrators who did not comment in detail about the benefits of a cohort model in her programming, suggested it is a strong means of support for students in the program.

The quality of faculty came through all the interviews as either a positive or a negative, suggesting that it is a critical component of principal preparation programming consistent with the research. The faculty qualities that kept emerging from the interviews were transparency, open communication, and availability as necessary for students to comprehend and process the learning objectives. The instructor's ability to make real-world connections to issues affecting schools today was noted as a critical attribute. The overall tone from the administrators interviewed was one of admiration for their instructors, whom they felt went above and beyond to help them succeed.

The program structure was a common theme among the administrators as *supportive* to learning the necessary skills to be an effective leader able to handle real-world issues encountered in schools today. Components of the program structured, such as *anchor assessments*, were viewed as the most powerful part of the program that gave the students the most usable training and knowledge to lead a school. The interviews also cited writing assignments focused on real-world issues such as vision and mission statement proved more helpful than writing assignments focused on theory. However, most of the administrator comments agreed that the majority of their assignments were

linked to educational issues that currently existed in their school or relevant to what they could expect to encounter as a school administrator.

The data also revealed practical experience, internships, and communication strategies for dealing with difficult staff/parents/students as critical to their leadership success. The practical experience that each instructor allowed the students to bring to class allowed the material to become tangible and able to be immediately applied at their school, further enhancing their ability to synthesize the leadership concepts. Internships and partnerships with local schools were touted as instrumental in the students' gaining first-hand knowledge of educational leadership strategies necessary to succeed in today's schools. The communication strategies were lauded as critical, with all of the administrators stating that the lessons centered on communicating with the different stakeholders and were relevant to the scenarios explored in class centering on the actual realities of educational leadership. The common theme regarding communication was that the participants felt they needed more time spent on dealing with difficult staff and parents with more scenarios for them to work through.

Other areas that individual participants noted potentially needing more focus centered on specific areas that educational leaders deal with in the school setting. Sally stated she was "surprised" to find that two main parts of her job, special education and preschool programs, were areas not covered by her principal preparation programming. Jeremy added in his interview that he did not feel his programming prepared him for everything associated with building management stating he felt there are some things you cannot understand in class, such as budgeting.

Limitations to the Study

The current study gathered responses based on a limited number of selected individuals who agreed to participate in this study. The responses gathered during the interviews, while the questions consistently followed a semi-structured script, were subject to the researcher's interpretation during the coding process. The nature of this study focused on the experiences of recent graduates from one regional university. Since the study focused on principal preparation, it could have been viewed as evaluative, causing the participants to portray their experiences in a different light to avoid any negative attention on their university. Also, while the researchers collected background information on the participants before making the selection for inclusion in the study, he was not aware of any existing biases of the candidates.

The TELL Kentucky survey data used were from 2017, and while all of the participants were in administrative roles at their schools during 2017, some may have had less influence than others on the various categories reported in the TELL Kentucky survey. The amount of influence their position had on the direction of the school could account for some of the variances of the results reported.

Delimitations

This study is restrictive in nature. The themes and subsequent findings reported in the study only represent four graduates of one regional university. Due to the unique characteristics of this study and the specific context to which it was conducted, it would be difficult to replicate the study with precisely the same results.

Implications

While universities are constantly searching for innovative ways to reach students and conduct research on educational issues, they still struggle with a lack of understanding of the current problems facing principals and the best way to prepare them for these problems. As outlined by the general systems theory, this research analyzed the inputs, processes, and outputs of a regional university principal preparation program to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth in preparing tomorrow's educational leaders. Universities also struggle with consistent methods for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of their program's impact on the leadership success of recent graduates (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). The current study provides detailed information from four recent graduates from one regional university's principal preparation program that utilizes best practices to create tomorrow's educational leaders poised to lead a school to new heights. The information presented in this study should assist districts interested in creating a program to identify and support aspiring principals as well as colleges and universities looking to modify their principal preparation programming to equip their graduates for the challenges associated with school leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

A list of recommendations for further research is presented below.

1. Conduct a comparative case study of principal preparation programs among multiple regional universities. A cross-case analysis of the results could then be performed to identify consistencies and inconsistencies among program components.

2. Interview veteran and novice administrators from different educational settings to ascertain their thoughts regarding their ability to handle the rigors associated with educational leadership in today's schools as measured by the educational leadership standards put forth by both NELP and PSEL.
3. Conduct a quantitative study analyzing all colleges and universities across the Commonwealth of Kentucky to quantify the degree to which their programs align with the standards outlined by NELP.

Conclusions

In the review of the literature, many university programs evaluated are criticized for failing to prepare students for the rigors associated with educational leadership. Studies state that principal programs have not advanced enough to keep up with the realities associated with the skills necessary to effectively lead a school (George W. Bush Institute, 2016). The success of tomorrow's leaders is critically linked to the leadership abilities learned, practiced, and honed within university principal preparation programs.

Research indicates that effective leadership programs are research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, and are structured to enable collaborative activity between programs and area schools (Wilson, 2014). For a principal preparation program to be effective in equipping graduates for success, leadership standards that are grounded in research should serve as the anchor point for all programmatic choices. Professional standards for educational leaders serve as the foundation of leadership principles that guide the practice of today's educational leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Manna, 2015; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The themes that emerged

from the current study support that the regional university from where the administrators participating in the study graduated are utilizing best practices to produce high-quality administrators capable of successfully leading a school. The responses from each of the interviewed administrators regarding experiences and knowledge gained through their principal preparation program align with the research of critical attributes required for a successful principal preparation program.

The strengths of the regional university's principal preparation program were noted as

- creating real-world connections for students to develop their leadership skills and understanding;
- employing faculty that are experts in their field and able to create lessons that are relevant to the actual challenges they will face as educational leaders;
- responding to students with timely communication;
- incorporating projects that are linked to real-world educational issues; and
- providing access to minorities to assist in the cost of classes associated with educational leaders leading to building a more diverse system of school leadership.

The opportunities for growth to strengthen the regional university's principal preparation program's ability to prepare graduates for the rigors associated with school leadership were noted as

- developing communication strategies when dealing with difficult students, parents, and staff; and
- providing tools and strategies regarding managing conflict.

The regional university's principal preparation program utilizes theory-to-practice instruction, mentoring, internships, and cohort groups to enhance program experiences, strengthening the concepts taught in class with a support structure accessible by all students. The university's close connections with local schools create opportunities for students to partner with practitioners. This partnership was cited as an important component of the programming that furthers the student's ability to problem solve unexpected issues with students, staff, parents, facilities, and instruction.

The current study provides detailed, thick descriptions through comments from four recent graduates of a regional university's principal preparation program and who have taken administrator positions in local schools. The results of this study are intended to guide districts and universities in restructuring principal support and programming to effectively equip aspiring administrators for the challenges of leading a school in today's exposed environment where every decision is scrutinized and subjected to social media reviews that can create issues for unprepared novice administrators.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol Project

New Principals' Perceptions of Principal Preparation Programs: Did the Program Prepare them to be Effective Educational Leaders?

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Position of the interviewee: _____

The purpose for this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of recent graduates of a regional principal preparation program and describe whether the programming and leadership experiences gained through their principal preparation program adequately equipped them with the leadership skills needed to lead their school successfully.

Interview Questions:

1. How would you describe your first year as a principal?
2. What situations proved challenging for you to handle? Why?
3. What situations proved easy for you to handle? Why?
4. How did your principal preparation program prepare you to handle these situations?

5. How would you describe your district's support of new principals?
6. What parts of your principal leadership program best prepared you for your principal position?
7. What parts of your principal leadership program felt disconnected or outdated from the current realities associated with your role as principal? Explain?
8. Did your principal leadership program prepare you to develop your school's vision, mission, and core values?
9. Did your principal leadership program help you understand ethical dilemmas and establish professional norms as an educational leader?
10. How did your principal leadership program assist you in understanding equity as it relates to school leadership as well as establishing a support culture for your staff?
11. Describe how you provide instructional leadership to your staff. How did your principal leadership programming enhance your instructional leadership abilities?
12. What part of your principal leadership programming assisted your understanding of community and external leadership responsibilities as a school leader?
13. Did your principal leadership programming provide training on the fiscal and building management responsibilities you encountered during your first year as a principal?
14. Describe how you developed your professional development for your staff? Did your principal leadership programming provide strategies to develop professional development?
15. Describe the intern support of your university principal leadership program.

16. What recommendations would you make to improve the principal leadership program you recently completed?
17. How would you best describe your experiences with your principal preparation program in 10 words or less?

Appendix B

Implied Consent Letter for Peer Review

9/19/18

Dear Peer Reviewer,

You are invited to participate in a peer review for a doctoral study focused on the principal preparation program at [REDACTED]. Through this research I hope to understand how recent graduates of [REDACTED] principal preparation program feel the programming equipped them to successfully lead a school. You were selected to participate in a peer review of the proposed interview questions based on your expertise in working with principal leaders and your affiliation with the local educational cooperative, [REDACTED] Regional Educational cooperative.

If you decide to participate, please review the attached questions, providing feedback on each question to validate their inclusion in the interview protocol for this study. Your return of the interview questions, along with your feedback, is implied consent. The interview questions are designed to provide rich, thick, detail on how principals feel the programming at [REDACTED] prepared them for the rigors associated with leading a school. There are only 10 questions that will be asked of each participant during a semi-structured interview. No benefits accrue to you for participating in the peer review, but your responses will be used to ensure that the questions asked during the interview are valid to the topic of the study. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the peer review.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with [REDACTED] or myself. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. If you could send me your review by the 5th of November that would allow

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact me at 760-912-8909.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Robert S.P. King
WKU Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C

IRB Project Approval



*INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY*

DATE: January 29, 2019

TO: Robert King
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1381238-1] Principal Program Effectiveness: Novice Principal Perceptions
from One Regional University
REFERENCE #: IRB 19-237
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: January 29, 2019
EXPIRATION DATE: July 30, 2019
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a *signed* consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of July 30, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Robin Pyles at (270) 745-3360 or irb@wku.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Document



INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Principal Program Effectiveness: Novice Principal's Perceptions
from One Regional University

Investigator: Robert S.P. King, P-12 Admin Ldrshp Doctoral Candidate-WKU, 760-912-8909

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** I understand that the purpose of his research project is to determine how well my principal leadership program prepared me for the rigors associated with educational leadership.
2. **Explanation of Procedures:** The procedure for this study will be a multi-case study design. I understand that if I participate in the project I will be asked to respond to a series of open ended interview questions that requests background data on me and on my experiences gained through my principal preparation programming at my university. I have been advised that the interviews could take as little as 45 minutes or as long as 2 hours depending on my responses. I understand that there is a possibility of a follow-up interview if there is a need to clarify or add more information on any of my initial responses. I understand that the interview (s) will be recorded by the researcher in the interview. I understand that only the researcher will have access to these recordings and they will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. I also understand that the researcher will provide me a transcription of the interview to allow me the opportunity to validate my responses. I have been advised that all participants selected for interviews will be entered into a drawing at the conclusion of the study for a \$100 Amazon gift card.
3. **Discomfort and Risks:** No known discomfort and risks associated with this study.
4. **Benefits:** The benefits of participating in the study will be to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of principal leadership programming in preparing graduates to be successful educational leaders. The study will also serve to identify opportunities to enhance program offerings and components to align better with current leadership skills and abilities associated with the rigors and realities of educational leadership.

WKU IRB# 19-237
Approved: 1/29/2019
End Date: 7/30/2019
EXPEDITED
Original: 1/29/2019

5. **Confidentiality:** Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researchers will know your identity as a participant.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Participant

Date

Witness

Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. *(Initial here)* _____

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Robin Pyles, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-3360



WKU IRB# 19-237
Approved: 1/29/2019
End Date: 7/30/2019
EXPEDITED
Original: 1/29/2019